ESSAYS IN IDLENESS

BY

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To AGNES IRWIN.

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ESSAYS IN IDLENESS.

AGRIPPINA.

She is sitting now on my desk, and I glance at her with deference, mutely begging permission to begin. But her back is turned to me, and expresses in every curve such fine and delicate disdain that I falter and lose courage at the very threshold of my task. I have long known that cats are the most contemptuous of creatures, and that Agrippina is the most contemptuous of cats. The spirit of Bouhaki, the proud Theban beast that sat erect, with gold earrings in his ears, at the feet of his master, King Hana; the spirit of Muezza, whose slumbers Mahomet himself was not bold enough to disturb; the spirit of Micetto, Chateaubriand's ecclesiastical pet, dignified as a cardinal, and conscious ever that he was the gift of a sovereign pontiff, — the spirits of all

arrogant cats that have played scornful parts in the world's great comedy look out from Agrippina's yellow eyes, and hold me in subjection. I should like to explain to her, if I dared, that my desk is small, littered with many papers, and sadly overcrowded with the useful inutilities which affectionate friends delight in giving me at Christmas time. Sainte-Beuve's cat, I am aware, sat on his desk, and roamed at will among those precious manuscripts which no intrusive hand was ever permitted to touch; but Sainte-Beuve probably had sufficient space reserved for his own comfort and convenience. I have not; and Agrippina's beautifully ringed tail flapping across my copy distracts my attention, and imperils the neatness of my penmanship. Even when she is disposed to be affable, turns the light of her countenance upon me, watches with attentive curiosity every stroke I make, and softly, with curved paw, pats my pen as it travels over the paper, — even in these halcyon moments, though my self-love is flattered by her condescension, I am aware that I should work better and more rapidly if I denied myself this charming companionship.

But in truth it is impossible for a lover of cats to banish these alert, gentle, and discriminating little friends, who give us just enough of their regard and complaisance to make us hunger for more. M. Fée, the naturalist, who has written so admirably about animals, and who understands, as only a Frenchman can understand, the delicate and subtle organization of a cat, frankly admits that the keynote of its character is independence. It dwells under our roof, sleeps by our fire, endures our blandishments, and apparently enjoys our society, without for one moment forfeiting its sense of absolute freedom, without acknowledging any servile relation to the human creature who shelters it. "The cat," says M. Fée, "will never part with its liberty; it will neither be our servant, like the horse, nor our friend, like the dog. It consents to live as our guest; it accepts the home we offer and the food we give; it even goes so far as to solicit our caresses, but capriciously, and when it suits its humor to receive them."

Rude and masterful souls resent this fine self-sufficiency in a domestic animal, and require that it should have no will but theirs,

no pleasure that does not emanate from them. They are forever prating of the love and fidelity of the dog, of the beast that obeys their slightest word, crouches contentedly for hours at their feet, is exuberantly grateful for the smallest attention, and so affectionate that its demonstrations require to be curbed rather than encouraged. All this homage is pleasing to their vanity; yet there are people, less magisterial perhaps, or less exacting, who believe that true friendship, even with an animal, may be built upon mutual esteem and independence; that to demand gratitude is to be unworthy of it; and that obedience is not essential to agreeable and healthy intercourse. A man who owns a dog is, in every sense of the word, its master; the term expresses accurately their mutual relations. But it is ridiculous when applied to the limited possession of a cat. I am certainly not Agrippina's mistress, and the assumption of authority on my part would be a mere empty dignity, like those swelling titles which afford such innocent delight to the Freemasons of our severe republic. If I call Agrippina, she does not come; if I tell her to go away, she remains where she is; if I try to

persuade her to show off her one or two little accomplishments, she refuses, with courteous but unswerving decision. She has frolicsome moods, in which a thimble, a shoe-buttoner, a scrap of paper, or a piece of string will drive her wild with delight; she has moods of inflexible gravity, in which she stares solemnly at her favorite ball rolling over the carpet, without stirring one lazy limb to reach it. "Have I seen this foolish toy before?" she seems to be asking herself with musing austerity; "and can it be possible that there are cats who run after such frivolous trifles? Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity, save only to lie upon the hearth-rug, and be warm, and 'think grave thoughts to feed a serious soul.'" In such moments of rejection and humiliation, I comfort myself by recalling the words of one too wise for arrogance. "When I play with my cat," says Montaigne, "how do I know whether she does not make a jest of me? We entertain each other with mutual antics; and if I have my own time for beginning or refusing, she too has hers."

This is the spirit in which we should approach a creature so reserved and so utterly

self-sufficing; this is the only key we have to that natural distinction of character which repels careless and unobservant natures. When I am told that Agrippina is disobedient, ungrateful, cold-hearted, perverse, stupid, treacherous, and cruel, I no longer strive to check the torrent of abuse. I know that Buffon said all this, and much more, about cats, and that people have gone on repeating it ever since, principally because these spirited little beasts have remained just what it pleased Providence to make them, have preserved their primitive freedom through centuries of effete and demoralizing civilization. Why, I wonder, should a great many good men and women cherish an unreasonable grudge against one animal because it does not chance to possess the precise qualities of another? "My dog fetches my slippers for me every night," said a friend triumphantly, not long ago. "He puts them first to warm by the fire, and then brings them over to my chair, wagging his tail, and as proud as Punch. Would your cat do as much for you, I 'd like to know?" Assuredly not! If I waited for Agrippina to fetch me shoes or slippers, I should have no other resource save

to join as speedily as possible one of the barefooted religious orders of Italy. But, after all, fetching slippers is not the whole duty of domestic pets. As La Fontaine gently reminds us: —

"Tout animal n'a pas toutes propriétés."

We pick no quarrel with a canary because it does not talk like a parrot, nor with a parrot because it does not sing like a canary. We find no fault with a King Charles spaniel for not flying at the throat of a burglar, nor with a St. Bernard because we cannot put it in our pocket. Agrippina will never make herself serviceable, yet nevertheless is she of inestimable service. How many times have I rested tired eyes on her graceful little body, curled up in a ball and wrapped round with her tail like a parcel; or stretched out luxuriously on my bed, one paw coyly covering her face, the other curved gently inwards, as though clasping an invisible treasure! Asleep or awake, in rest or in motion, grave or gay, Agrippina is always beautiful; and it is better to be beautiful than to fetch and carry from the rising to the setting of the sun. She is droll, too, with an unconscious humor, even in her

most serious and sentimental moods. She has quite the longest ears that ever were seen on so small a cat, eyes more solemn than Athene's owl blinking in the sunlight, and an air of supercilious disdain that would have made Diogenes seem young and ardent by her side. Sitting on the library table, under the evening lamp, with her head held high in air, her tall ears as erect as chimneys, and her inscrutable gaze fixed on the darkest corner of the room, Agrippina inspires in the family sentiments of mingled mirthfulness and awe. To laugh at her in such moments, however, is to incur her supreme displeasure. I have known her to jump down from the table, and walk haughtily out of the room, because of a single half-suppressed but wholly indecorous giggle.

Schopenhauer has said that the reason domestic pets are so lovable and so helpful to us is because they enjoy, quietly and placidly, the present moment. Life holds no future for them, and consequently no care; if they are content, their contentment is absolute; and our jaded and wearied spirits find a natural relief in the sight of creatures whose little cups of happiness can so easily be filled to the brim.

Walt Whitman expresses the same thought more coarsely when he acknowledges that he loves the society of animals because they do not sweat and whine over their condition, nor lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins, nor sicken him with discussions of their duty. In truth, that admirable counsel of Sydney Smith's, "Take short views of life," can be obeyed only by the brutes; for the thought that travels even to the morrow is long enough to destroy our peace of mind, inasmuch as we know not what the morrow may bring forth. But when Agrippina has breakfasted, and washed, and sits in the sunlight blinking at me with affectionate contempt, I feel soothed by her absolute and unqualified enjoyment. I know how full my day will be of things that I don't want particularly to do, and that are not particularly worth doing; but for her, time and the world hold only this brief moment of contentment. Slowly the eyes close, gently the little body is relaxed. Oh, you who strive to relieve your overwrought nerves, and cultivate power through repose, watch the exquisite languor of a drowsy cat, and despair of imitating such perfect and restful grace!

There is a gradual yielding of every muscle to the soft persuasiveness of slumber; the flexible frame is curved into tender lines, the head nestles lower, the paws are tucked out of sight; no convulsive throb or start betrays a rebellious alertness; only a faint quiver of unconscious satisfaction, a faint heaving of the tawny sides, a faint gleam of the half-shut yellow eyes, and Agrippina is asleep. I look at her for one wistful moment, and then turn resolutely to my work. It were ignoble to wish myself in her place, and yet how charming to be able to settle down to a nap, *sans peur et sans reproche*, at ten o'clock in the morning!

These, then, are a few of the pleasures to be derived from the society of an amiable cat; and by an amiable cat I mean one that, while maintaining its own dignity and delicate reserve, is nevertheless affable and condescending in the company of human beings. There is nothing I dislike more than newspaper and magazine stories about priggish pussies — like the children in Sunday-school books — that share their food with hungry beasts from the back alleys, and show touching fidelity to old blind masters, and hunt partridges, in a spirit

of noble self-sacrifice, for consumptive mistresses, and scorn to help themselves to delicacies from the kitchen tables, and arouse their households so often in cases of fire that I should suspect them of starting the conflagrations in order to win applause by giving the alarm. Whatever a real cat may or may not be, it is never a prig, and all true lovers of the race have been quick to recognize and appreciate this fact.

"I value in the cat," says Chateaubriand, "that independent and almost ungrateful temper which prevents it from attaching itself to any one; the indifference with which it passes from the salon to the housetop. When you caress it, it stretches itself out and arches its back responsively; but that is caused by physical pleasure, and not, as in the case of the dog, by a silly satisfaction in loving and being faithful to a master who returns thanks in kicks. The cat lives alone, has no need of society, does not obey except when it likes, pretends to sleep that it may see the more clearly, and scratches everything that it can scratch."

Here is a sketch spirited enough, and of good outline, but hardly correct in detail. A cat

seldom manifests affection, yet is often distinctly social, and likes to see itself the petted minion of a family group. Agrippina, in fact, so far from living alone, will not, if she can help it, remain for a moment in a room by herself. She is content to have me as a companion, perhaps in default of better; but if I go upstairs or downstairs in search of a book, or my eyeglasses, or any one of the countless things that are never where they ought to be, Agrippina follows closely at my heels. Sometimes, when she is fast asleep, I steal softly out of the door, thinking to escape her vigilance; but before I have taken a dozen steps she is under my feet, mewing a gentle reproach, and putting on all the injured airs of a deserted Ariadne. I should like to think such behavior prompted by affection rather than by curiosity; but in my candid moments I find this "pathetic fallacy" a difficult sentiment to cherish. There are people, I am aware, who trustfully assert that their pets love them; and one such sanguine creature has recently assured the world that "no man who boasts the real intimacy and confidence of a cat would dream of calling his four-footed

friend 'puss.'" But is not such a boast rather ill-timed at best? How dare any man venture to assert that he possesses the intimacy and confidence of an animal so exclusive and so reserved? I doubt if Cardinal Wolsey, in the zenith of his pride and power, claimed the intimacy and confidence of the superb cat who sat in a cushioned armchair by his side, and reflected with mimic dignity the full-blown honors of the Lord High Chancellor of England. Agrippina, I am humbly aware, grants me neither her intimacy nor her confidence, but only her companionship, which I endeavor to receive modestly, and without flaunting my favors to the world. She is displeased and even downcast when I go out, and she greets my return with delight, thrusting her little gray head between the banisters the instant I open the house door, and waving a welcome in mid-air with one ridiculously small paw. Being but mortal, I am naturally pleased with these tokens of esteem, but I do not, on that account, go about with arrogant brow, and boast of my intimacy with Agrippina. I should be laughed at, if I did, by everybody who is privileged to possess and appreciate a cat.

As for curiosity, that vice which the Abbé Galiani held to be unknown to animals, but which the more astute Voltaire detected in every little dog that he saw peering out of the window of its master's coach, it is the ruling passion of the feline breast. A closet door left ajar, a box with half-closed lid, an open bureau drawer, — these are the objects that fill a cat with the liveliest interest and delight. Agrippina watches breathlessly the unfastening of a parcel, and tries to hasten matters by clutching actively at the string. When its contents are shown her, she examines them gravely, and then, with a sigh of relief, settles down to repose. The slightest noise disturbs and irritates her until she discovers its cause. If she hears a footstep in the hall, she runs out to see whose it is, and, like certain troublesome little people I have known, she dearly loves to go to the front door every time the bell is rung. From my window she surveys the street with tranquil scrutiny, and, if boys are playing below, she follows their games with a steady, scornful stare, very different from the wistful eagerness of a friendly dog, quivering to join in the sport. Sometimes the boys

catch sight of her, and shout up rudely at her window; and I can never sufficiently admire Agrippina's conduct upon these trying occasions, the well-bred composure with which she affects neither to see nor to hear them, nor to be aware that there are such objectionable creatures as children in the world. Sometimes, too, the terrier that lives next door comes out to sun himself in the street, and, beholding my cat sitting well out of reach, he dances madly up and down the pavement, barking with all his might, and rearing himself on his short hind legs, in a futile attempt to dislodge her. Then the spirit of evil enters Agrippina's little heart. The window is open, and she creeps to the extreme edge of the stone sill, stretches herself at full length, peers down smilingly at the frenzied dog, dangles one paw enticingly in the air, and exerts herself with quiet malice to drive him to desperation. Her sense of humor is awakened by his frantic efforts, and by her own absolute security; and not until he is spent with exertion, and lies panting and exhausted on the bricks, does she arch her graceful back, stretch her limbs lazily in the

sun, and with one light bound spring from the window to my desk. Wisely has Moncrif observed that a cat is not merely diverted by everything that moves, but is convinced that all nature is occupied exclusively with catering to her diversion.

There is a charming story told by M. Champfleury, who has written so much and so admirably about cats, of a poor hermit whose piety and asceticism were so great that in a vision he was permitted to behold his place in heaven, next to that of St. Gregory, the sovereign pontiff of Christendom. The hermit, who possessed nothing upon earth but a female cat, was abashed by the thought that in the next world he was destined to rank with so powerful a prince of the Church; and perhaps — for who knows the secret springs of spiritual pride? — he fancied that his self-inflicted poverty would win for him an even higher reward. Whereupon a second revelation made known to him that his detachment from the world was by no means so complete as he imagined, for that he loved and valued his cat, the sole companion of his solitude, more than St. Gregory loved and valued all

his earthly possessions. The Pope on his throne was the truer ascetic of the two.

This little tale conveys to us, in addition to its excellent moral, — never more needed than at present, — a pleasing truth concerning the lovability of cats. While they have never attained, and never deserve to attain, the widespread and somewhat commonplace popularity of dogs, their fascination is a more potent and irresistible charm. He who yields himself to the sweet seductiveness of a cat is beguiled forever from the simple, honorable friendship of the more generous and open-hearted beast. The small domestic sphinx whose inscrutable eyes never soften with affection; the fetich animal that comes down to us from the far past, adored, hated, and feared, — a god in wise and silent Egypt, a plaything in old Rome, a hunted and unholy creature, suffering one long martyrdom throughout the half-seen, dimly-fathomed Middle Ages, — even now this lovely, uncanny pet is capable of inspiring mingled sentiments of horror and devotion. Those who are under its spell rejoice in their thralldom, and, like M. Champfleury's hermit, grow strangely wed-

ded to this mute, unsympathetic comradeship. Those who have inherited the old, half-fearful aversion render a still finer tribute to the cat's native witchery and power. I have seen middle-aged women, of dignified and tranquil aspect, draw back with unfeigned dismay at the sight of Agrippina, a little ball of gray and yellow fur, curled up in peaceful slumber on the hearth rug. And this instinctive shrinking has nothing in common with the perfectly reasonable fear we entertain for a terrier snapping and snarling at our heels, or for a mastiff the size of a calf, which our friend assures us is as gentle as a baby, but which looks able and ready to tear us limb from limb. It may be ignominious to be afraid of dogs, but the emotion is one which will bear analysis and explanation; we know exactly what it is we fear; while the uneasiness with which many people behold a harmless and perfectly indifferent cat is a faint reflection of that superstitious terror which the nineteenth century still borrows occasionally from the ninth. We call it by a different name, and account for it on purely natural principles, in deference to progress; but the

Mediæval peasant who beheld his cat steal out, like a gray shadow, on St. John's Eve, to join in unholy rites, felt the same shuddering abhorrence which we witness and wonder at to-day. He simplified matters somewhat, and eased his troubled mind by killing the beast; for cats that ventured forth on the feast of St. John, or on Halloween, or on the second Wednesday in Lent, did so at their peril. Fires blazed for them in every village, and even quiet stay-at-homes were too often hunted from their chimney-corners to a cruel death. There is a receipt signed in 1575 by one Lucas Pommoreux, — abhorred forever be his name! — to whom has been paid the sum of a hundred *sols parisis* "for having supplied for three years all the cats required for the fire on St. John's Day;" and be it remembered that the gracious child, afterwards Louis XIII., interceded with Henry IV. for the lives of these poor animals, sacrificed to wicked sport and an unreasoning terror.

Girt around with fear, and mystery, and subtle associations of evil, the cat comes down to us through the centuries; and from every land fresh traditions of sorcery claim it for their

own. In Brittany is still whispered the dreadful tale of the cats that danced with sacrilegious glee around the crucifix until their king was slain; and in Sicily men know that if a black cat serves seven masters in turn he carries the soul of the seventh into hell. In Russia black cats become devils at the end of seven years, and in southern Europe they are merely serving their apprenticeship as witches. Norwegian folk-lore is rich in ghastly stories like that of the wealthy miller whose mill has been twice burned down on Whitsun night, and for whom a traveling tailor offers to keep watch. The tailor chalks a circle on the floor, writes the Lord's prayer around it, and waits until midnight, when a troop of cats rush in, and hang a great pot of pitch over the fireplace. Again and again they try to overturn this pitch, but every time the tailor frightens them away; and when their leader endeavors stealthily to draw him outside of his magic circle, he cuts off her paw with his knife. Then they all fly howling into the night, and the next morning the miller sees with joy his mill standing whole and unharmed. But the miller's wife cowers under the bedclothes, of-

fering her left hand to the tailor, and hiding as best she can her right arm's bleeding stump.

Finer even than this tale is the well-known story which "Monk" Lewis told to Shelley of a gentleman who, late one night, went to visit a friend living on the outskirts of a forest in east Germany. He lost his path, and, after wandering aimlessly for some time, beheld at last a light streaming from the windows of an old and ruined abbey. Looking in, he saw a procession of cats lowering into the grave a small coffin with a crown upon it. The sight filled him with horror, and, spurring his horse, he rode away as fast as he could, never stopping until he reached his destination, long after midnight. His friend was still awaiting him, and at once he recounted what had happened; whereupon a cat that lay sleeping by the fire sprang to its feet, cried out, "Then I am the King of the Cats!" and disappeared like a flash up the chimney.

For my part, I consider this the best cat story in all literature, full of suggestiveness and terror, yet picturesque withal, and leaving ample room in the mind for speculation. Why

was not the heir apparent bidden to the royal funeral? Was there a disputed succession, and how are such points settled in the mysterious domain of cat-land? The notion that these animals gather in ghost-haunted churches and castles for their nocturnal revels is one common to all parts of Europe. We remember how the little maiden of the "Mountain Idyl" confides to Heine that the innocent-looking cat in the chimney-corner is really a witch, and that at midnight, when the storm is high, she steals away to the ruined keep, where the spirits of the dead wait spellbound for the word that shall waken them. In all scenes of impish revelry cats play a prominent part, although occasionally, by virtue of their dual natures, they serve as barriers against the powers of evil. There is the old story of the witch's cat that was grateful to the good girl who gave it some ham to eat, — I may observe here, parenthetically, that I have never known a cat that would touch ham, — and there is the fine bit of Italian folk-lore about the servant maid who, with no other protector than a black cat, ventures to disturb a procession of ghosts on the dreadful Night of the Dead. "It is

well for you that the cat lies in your arms," the angry spirit says to her; "otherwise what I am, you also would be." The last pale reflex of a universal tradition I found three years ago in London, where the bad behavior of the Westminster cats — proverbially the most dissolute and profligate specimens of their race — has given rise to the pleasant legend of a country house whither these rakish animals retire for nights of gay festivity, and whence they return in the early morning, jaded, repentant, and forlorn.

Of late years there has been a rapid and promising growth of what disaffected and alliterative critics call the "cat cult," and poets and painters vie with one another in celebrating the charms of this long-neglected pet. Mr. M. H. Spielmann's beautiful volume in praise of Madame Henriette Ronner and her pictures is a treasure upon which many an ardent lover of cats will cast wandering and wistful glances. It is impossible for even the most disciplined spirit not to yearn over these little furry darlings, these gentle, mischievous, lazy, irresistible things. As for Banjo, that dear and sentimental kitten, with his head on one

side like Lydia Languish, and a decorous melancholy suffusing his splendid eyes, let any obdurate scorner of the race look at his loveliness and be converted. Mrs. Graham R. Tomson's pretty anthology, "Concerning Cats," is another step in the right direction; a dainty volume of selections from French and English verse, where we may find old favorites like Cowper's "Retired Cat" and Calverly's "Sad Memories," graceful epitaphs on departed pussies, some delightful poems from Baudelaire, and three, no less delightful, from the pen of Mrs. Tomson herself, whose preface, or "foreword," is enough to win for her at once the friendship and sympathy of the elect. The book, while it contains a good deal that might well have been omitted, is necessarily a small one; for poets, English poets especially, have just begun to sing the praises of the cat, as they have for generations sung the praises of the horse and dog. Nevertheless, all English literature, and all the literatures of every land, are full of charming allusions to this friendly animal, — allusions the brevity of which only enhances their value. Those two delicious lines of Herrick's, for example, —

"And the brisk mouse may feast herself with crumbs,
Till that the green-eyed kitling comes," —

are worth the whole of Wordsworth's solemn poem, "The Kitten and the Falling Leaves." What did Wordsworth know of the innate vanity, the affectation and coquetry, of kittenhood? He saw the little beast gamboling on the wall, and he fancied her as innocent as she looked, — as though any living creature *could* be as innocent as a kitten looks! With touching simplicity, he believed her all unconscious of the admiration she was exciting: —

"What would little Tabby care
For the plaudits of the crowd?
Over happy to be proud,
Over wealthy in the treasure
Of her own exceeding pleasure!"

Ah, the arrant knavery of that kitten! The tiny impostor, showing off her best tricks, and feigning to be occupied exclusively with her own infantile diversion! We can see her now, prancing and paddling after the leaves, and all the while peeping out of "the tail o' her ee" at the serene poet and philosopher, and waving her naughty tail in glee over his confidence and condescension.

Heine's pretty lines, —

"And close beside me the cat sits purring,
Warming her paws at the cheery gleam;
The flames keep flitting, and flicking, and whirring;
My mind is wrapped in a realm of dream," —

find their English echo in the letter Shelley writes to Peacock, describing, half wistfully, the shrines of the Penates, "whose hymns are the purring of kittens, the hissing of kettles, the long talks over the past and dead, the laugh of children, the warm wind of summer filling the quiet house, and the pelting storm of winter struggling in vain for entrance." How incomplete would these pictures be, how incomplete is any fireside sketch, without the purring kitten or drowsy cat!

"The queen I am o' that cozy place;
As wi' ilka paw I dicht my face,
I sing an' purr wi' mickle grace."

This is the sphinx of the hearthstone, the little god of domesticity, whose presence turns a house into a home. Even the chilly desolation of a hotel may be rendered endurable by these affable and discriminating creatures; for one of them, as we know, once welcomed Sir Walter Scott, and softened for him the unfamiliar

and unloved surroundings. "There are no dogs in the hotel where I lodge," he writes to Abbotsford from London, "but a tolerably conversable cat *who* eats a mess of cream with me in the morning." Of course it did, the wise and lynx-eyed beast! I make no doubt that, day after day and week after week, that cat had wandered superbly amid the common throng of lodgers, showing favor to none, and growing cynical and disillusioned by constant contact with a crowd. Then, one morning, it spied the noble, rugged face which neither man nor beast could look upon without loving, and forthwith tendered its allegiance on the spot. Only "tolerably conversable" it was, this reserved and town-bred animal; less urbane because less happy than the much-respected retainer at Abbotsford, Master Hinse of Hinsefeld, whom Sir Walter called his friend. "Ah, mon grand ami, vous avez tué mon autre grand ami!" he sighed, when the huge hound Nimrod ended poor Hinse's placid career. And if Scott sometimes seems to disparage cats, as when he unkindly compares Oliver-le-Dain to one, in "Quentin Durward," he atones for such indignity by the use of the little pronoun

"who" when writing of the London puss. My own habit is to say "who" on similar occasions, and I am glad to have so excellent an authority.

It were an endless though a pleasant task to recount all that has been said, and well said, in praise of the cat by those who have rightly valued her companionship. M. Loti's Moumoutte Blanche and Moumoutte Chinoise are well known and widely beloved, and M. Théophile Gautier's charming pages are too familiar for comment. Who has not read with delight of the Black and White Dynasties that for so long ruled with gentle sway over his hearth and heart; of Madame Théophile, who thought the parrot was a green chicken; of Don Pierrot de Navarre, who deeply resented his master's staying out late at night; of the graceful and fastidious Séraphita; the gluttonous Enjolras; the acute Bohemian, Gavroche; the courteous and well-mannered Eponine, who received M. Gautier's guests in the drawing-room and dined at his table, taking each course as it was served, and restraining any rude distaste for food not to her fancy. "Her place was laid without a knife and fork,

indeed, but with a glass, and she went regularly through dinner, from soup to dessert, awaiting her turn to be helped, and behaving with a quiet propriety which most children might imitate with advantage. At the first stroke of the bell she would appear, and when I came into the dining-room she would be at her post, upright on her chair, her forepaws on the edge of the tablecloth; and she would present her smooth forehead to be kissed, like a well-bred little girl who was affectionately polite to relatives and old people."

I have read this pretty description several times to Agrippina, who is extremely wayward and capricious about her food, rejecting plaintively one day the viands which she has eaten with apparent enjoyment the day before. In fact, the difficulty of catering to her is so well understood by tradesmen that recently, when the housemaid carried her on an errand to the grocery, — Agrippina is very fond of these jaunts and of the admiration she excites, — the grocer, a fatherly man, with cats of his own, said briskly, "Is this the little lady who eats the biscuits?" and presented her on the spot with several choice varieties from which

to choose. She is fastidious, too, about the way in which her meals are served; disliking any other dishes than her own, which are of blue-and-white china; requiring that her meat should be cut up fine and all the fat removed, and that her morning oatmeal should be well sugared and creamed. Milk she holds in scorn. My friends tell me sometimes that it is not the common custom of cats to receive so much attention at table, and that it is my fault Agrippina is so exacting; but such grumblers fail to take into consideration the marked individuality that is the charm of every kindly treated puss. She differs from her sisters as widely as one woman differs from another, and reveals varying characteristics of good and evil, varying powers of intelligence and adaptation. She scales splendid heights of virtue, and, unlike Sir Thomas Browne, is "singular in offenses." Even those primitive instincts which we believe all animals hold in common are lost in acquired ethics and depravity. No heroism could surpass that of the London cat who crawled back five times under the stage of the burning theatre to rescue her litter of kittens, and, having carried four of them to

safety, perished devotedly with the fifth. On the other hand, I know of a cat who drowned her three kittens in a water-butt, for no reason, apparently, save to be rid of them, and that she might lie in peace on the hearth rug, — a murder well planned, deliberate, and cruel.

> "So Tiberius might have sat,
> Had Tiberius been a cat."

Only in her grace and beauty, her love of comfort, her dignity of bearing, her courteous reserve, and her independence of character does puss remain immutable and unchanged. These are the traits which win for her the warmest corner by the fire, and the unshaken regard of those who value her friendship and aspire to her affection. These are the traits so subtly suggested by Mrs. Tomson in a sonnet which every true lover of cats feels in his heart *must* have been addressed to his own particular pet: —

> "Half gentle kindliness, and half disdain,
> Thou comest to my call, serenely suave,
> With humming speech and gracious gestures grave,
> In salutation courtly and urbane;
> Yet must I humble me thy grace to gain,
> For wiles may win thee, but no arts enslave;

And nowhere gladly thou abidest, save
Where naught disturbs the concord of thy reign.

"Sphinx of my quiet hearth! who deign'st to dwell
Friend of my toil, companion of mine ease,
Thine is the lore of Ra and Rameses;
That men forget dost thou remember well,
Beholden still in blinking reveries,
With sombre sea-green gaze inscrutable."

THE CHILDREN'S POETS.

Now and then I hear it affirmed by sad-voiced pessimists, whispering in the gloom, that people do not read as much poetry in our day as they did in our grandfathers', that this is distinctly the era of prose, and that the poet is no longer, as Shelley claimed, the unacknowledged legislator of the world. Perhaps these cheerless statements are true, though it would be more agreeable not to believe them. Perhaps, with the exception of Browning, whom we study because he is difficult to understand, and of Shakespeare, whom we read because it is hard to content our souls without him, the poets have slipped away from our crowded lives, and are best known to us through the medium of their reviewers. We are always wandering from the paths of pleasure, and this may be one of our deviations. Yet what matters it, after all, while around us, on every side, in school-

rooms and nurseries, in quiet corners and by cheerful fires, the children are reading poetry? — reading it with a joyous enthusiasm and an absolute surrendering of spirit which we can all remember, but can never feel again. Well might Sainte-Beuve speak bravely of the clear, fine penetration peculiar to childhood. Well might he recall, with wistful sighs, "that instinctive knowledge which afterwards ripens into judgment, but of which the fresh lucidity remains forever unapproached." He knew, as all critics have known, that it is only the child who responds swiftly, pliantly, and unreservedly to the allurements of the imagination. He knew that, when poetry is in question, it is better to feel than to think; and that with the growth of a guarded and disciplined intelligence, straining after the enjoyment which perfection in literary art can give, the first careless rapture of youth fades into a half-remembered dream.

If we are disposed to doubt the love that children bear to poetry, a love concerning which they exhibit a good deal of reticence, let us consider only the alacrity with which they study, for their own delight, the poems

that please them best. How should we fare, I wonder, if tried by a similar test? How should we like to sit down and commit to memory Tennyson's "Œnone," or "Locksley Hall," or Byron's apostrophe to the Ocean, or the battle scene in "Marmion"? Yet I have known children to whom every word of these and many other poems was as familiar as the alphabet; and a great deal more familiar — thank Heaven! — than the multiplication table, or the capitals of the United States. A rightly constituted child may find the paths of knowledge hopelessly barred by a single page of geography, or by a single sum in fractions; but he will range at pleasure through the paths of poetry, having the open sesame to every door. Sir Walter Scott, who was essentially a rightly constituted child, did not even wait for a formal introduction to his letters, but managed to learn the ballad of Hardyknute before he knew how to read, and went shouting it around the house, warming his baby blood to fighting-point, and training himself in very infancy to voice the splendors of his manhood. He remembered this ballad, too, and loved it all his life, reciting it once

with vast enthusiasm to Lord Byron, whose own unhappy childhood had been softened and vivified by the same innocent delights.

In truth, the most charming thing about youth is the tenacity of its impressions. If we had the time and courage to study a dozen verses to-day, we should probably forget eleven of them in a fortnight; but the poetry we learned as children remains, for the most part, indelibly fixed in our memories, and constitutes a little Golden Treasury of our own, more dear and valuable to us than any other collection, because it contains only our chosen favorites, and is always within the reach of reference. Once, when I was very young, I asked a girl companion — well known now in the world of literature — if she did not grow weary waiting for trains, which were always late, at the suburban station where she went to school. "Oh, no," was the cheerful reply. "If I have no book, and there is no one here to talk with, I walk up and down the platform and think over the poetry that I know." Admirable occupation for an idle minute! Even the tedium of railway traveling loses half its horrors if one can withdraw

at pleasure into the society of the poets and, soothed by their gentle and harmonious voices, forget the irksome recurrence of familiar things.

It has been often demonstrated, and as often forgotten, that children do not need to have poetry written down to their intellectual level, and do not love to see the stately Muse ostentatiously bending to their ear. In the matter of prose, it seems necessary for them to have a literature of their own, over which they linger willingly for a little while, as though in the sunny antechamber of a king. But in the golden palace of the poets there is no period of probation, there is no enforced attendance upon petty things. The clear-eyed children go straight to the heart of the mystery, and recognize in the music of words, in the enduring charm of metrical quality, an element of never-ending delight. When to this simple sensuous pleasure is added the enchantment of poetic images, lovely and veiled and dimly understood, then the delight grows sweeter and keener, the child's soul flowers into a conscious love of poetry, and one lifelong source of happiness is gained.

But it is never through infantine or juvenile verses that the end is reached. There is no poet dearer to the young than Tennyson, and it was not the least of his joys to know that all over the English-speaking world children were tuning their hearts to the music of his lines, were dreaming vaguely and rapturously over the beauty he revealed. Therefore the insult seemed greater and more wanton when this beloved idol of our nurseries deliberately offered to his eager audience such anxiously babyish verses as those about Minnie and Winnie, and the little city maiden who goes straying among the flowers. Is there in Christendom a child who wants to be told by one of the greatest of poets that

> "Minnie and Winnie
> Slept in a shell;"

that the shell was pink within and silver without; and that

> "Sounds of the great sea
> Wandered about.
>
> "Two bright stars
> Peep'd into the shell.
> 'What are they dreaming of?
> Who can tell?'

"Started a green linnet
Out of the croft;
'Wake, little ladies,
The sun is aloft.'"

It is not in these tones that poetry speaks to the childish soul, though it is too often in this fashion that the poet strives to adjust himself to what he thinks is the childish standard. He lowers his sublime head from the stars, and pipes with painstaking flatness on a little reed, while the children wander far away, and listen breathlessly to older and dreamier strains.

"She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces thro' the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She look'd down to Camelot,
Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror crack'd from side to side;
'The curse is come upon me,' cried
The Lady of Shalott."

Here is the mystic note that childhood loves, and here, too, is the sweet constraint of linked rhymes that makes music for its ears. How many of us can remember well our early joy in this poem, which was but as another and

more exquisite fairy tale, ranking fitly with Andersen's "Little Mermaid," and "Undine," and all sad stories of unhappy lives! And who shall forget the sombre passion of "Oriana," of those wailing verses that rang through our little hearts like the shrill sobbing of winter storms, of that strange tragedy that oppressed us more with fear than pity!

> "When the long dun wolds are ribb'd with snow,
> And loud the Norland whirlwinds blow,
> Oriana,
> Alone I wander to and fro,
> Oriana."

If any one be inclined to think that children must understand poetry in order to appreciate and enjoy it, that one enchanted line,—

> "When the long dun wolds are ribb'd with snow,"—

should be sufficient to undeceive him forever. The spell of those finely chosen words lies in the shadowy and half-seen picture they convey,—a picture with indistinct outlines, as of an unknown land, where the desolate spirit wanders moaning in the gloom. The whole poem is inexpressibly alluring to an imaginative child, and its atmosphere of bleak despondency darkens suddenly into horror at

the breaking off of the last line from visions of the grave and of peaceful death, —

> "I hear the roaring of the sea,
> Oriana."

The same grace of indistinctness, though linked with a gentler mood and with a softer music, makes the lullaby in "The Princess" a lasting delight to children, while the pretty cradle-song in "Sea Dreams," beginning, —

> "What does little birdie say
> In her nest at peep of day?"

has never won their hearts. Its motive is too apparent, its nursery flavor too pronounced. It has none of the condescension of "Minnie and Winnie," and grown people can read it with pleasure; but a simple statement of obvious truths, or a simple line of obvious reasoning, however dexterously narrated in prose or verse, has not the art to hold a youthful soul in thrall.

If it be a matter of interest to know what poets are most dear to the children around us, to the ordinary "apple-eating" little boys and girls for whom we are hardly brave enough to predict a shining future, it is delightful to be told by favorite authors and

by well-loved men of letters what poets first bewitched their ardent infant minds. It is especially pleasant to have Mr. Andrew Lang admit us a little way into his confidence, and confess to us that he disliked "Tam O'Shanter" when his father read it aloud to him; preferring, very sensibly, "to take my warlocks and bogies with great seriousness." Of course he did, and the sympathies of all children are with him in his choice. The ghastly details of that witches' Sabbath are far beyond a child's limited knowledge of demonology and the Scotch dialect. Tam's escape and Maggie's final catastrophe seem like insults offered to the powers of darkness; only the humor of the situation is apparent, and humor is seldom, to the childish mind, a desirable element of poetry. Not all the spirit of Caldecott's illustrations can make "John Gilpin" a real favorite in our nurseries, while "The Jackdaw of Rheims" is popular simply because children, being proof against cynicism, accept the story as it is told, with much misplaced sympathy for the thievish bird, and many secret rejoicings over his restoration to grace and feathers. As for "The Pied Piper of Hamelin,"

its humor is swallowed up in tragedy, and the terror of what is to come helps little readers over such sad stumbling-blocks as

> "So munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon,
> Breakfast, dinner, supper, luncheon!"

lines which are every whit as painful to their ears as to ours. I have often wondered how the infant Southeys and Coleridges, that bright-eyed group of alert and charming children, all afire with romantic impulses, received "The Cataract of Lodore," when papa Southey condescended to read it in the schoolroom. What well-bred efforts to appear pleased and grateful! What secret repulsion to a senseless clatter of words, as remote from the silvery sweetness, the cadenced music of falling waters, as from the unalterable requirements of poetic art!

> "And moreover he tasked me
> To tell him in rhyme."

Ah! unwise little son, to whose rash request generations of children have owed the presence, in readers and elocution-books and volumes of "Select Lyrics for the Nursery," of those hated and hateful verses.

"Poetry came to me with Sir Walter Scott,"

says Mr. Lang; with "Marmion," and the "Last Minstrel," and "The Lady of the Lake," read "for the twentieth time," and ever with fresh delight. Poetry came to Scott with Shakespeare, studied rapturously by firelight in his mother's dressing-room, when all the household thought him fast asleep, and with Pope's translation of the Iliad, that royal road over which the Muse has stepped, smiling, into many a boyish heart. Poetry came to Pope — poor little lame lad — with Spenser's "Faerie Queene;" with the brave adventures of strong, valiant knights, who go forth, unblemished and unfrighted, to do battle with dragons and "Paynims cruel." And so the links of the magic chain are woven, and child hands down to child the spell that holds the centuries together. I cannot bear to hear the unkind things which even the most tolerant of critics are wont to say about Pope's "Iliad," remembering as I do how many boys have received from its pages their first poetic stimulus, their first awakening to noble things. What a charming picture we have of Coleridge, a feeble, petulant child tossing with fever on his little bed, and of his brother Francis stealing

up, in defiance of all orders, to sit by his side and read him Pope's translation of Homer. The bond that drew these boys together was forged in such breathless moments and in such mutual pleasures; for Francis, the handsome, spirited sailor lad, who climbed trees, and robbed orchards, and led all dangerous sports, had little in common with his small, silent, precocious brother. "Frank had a violent love of beating me," muses Coleridge, in a tone of mild complaint (and no wonder, we think, for a more beatable child than Samuel Taylor it would have been hard to find). "But whenever that was superseded by any humor or circumstance, he was very fond of me, and used to regard me with a strange mixture of admiration and contempt." More contempt than admiration, probably; yet was all resentment forgotten, and all unkindness at an end, while one boy read to the other the story of Hector and Patroclus, and of great Ajax, with sorrow in his heart, pacing round his dead comrade, as a tawny lioness paces round her young when she sees the hunters coming through the woods. As a companion picture to this we have little Dante Gabriel Rossetti playing

Othello in the nursery, and so carried away by the passionate impulse of these lines, —

> "In Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
> I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
> And smote him, thus," —

that he struck himself fiercely on the breast with an iron chisel, and fainted under the blow. We can hardly believe that Shakespeare is beyond the mental grasp of childhood, when Scott, at seven, crept out of bed on winter nights to read "King Henry IV.," and Rossetti, at nine, was overwhelmed by the agony of Othello's remorse.

On the other hand, there are writers, and very brilliant writers, too, whose early lives appear to have been undisturbed by such keenly imaginative pastimes, and for whom there are no well-loved and familiar figures illumined forever in "that bright, clear, undying light that borders the edge of the oblivion of infancy." Count Tolstoi confesses himself to have been half hurt, half puzzled, by his fellow-students at the University of Moscow, who seemed to him so coarse and inele-

gant, and yet who had read and enjoyed so much. "Pushkin and Zhukovsky were literature to them," he says wistfully, "and not, as to me, little books in yellow bindings which I had studied as a child." But how, one wonders, could Pushkin have remained merely a "little book in yellow binding" to any boy who had had the happiness of studying him as a child? Pushkin is the Russian Byron, and embodies in his poems the same spirit of restless discontent, of dejected languor, of passionate revolt; not revolt against the Tsar, which is a limited and individual judgment, but revolt against the bitter penalties of life, which is a sentiment common to the youth of all nations and of every age. Yet there are Englishmen who have no word save that of scorn for Byron, and I feel uncertain whether such critics ever enjoyed the privilege of being boys at all. If to George Meredith's composed and complacent mind there strays any wanton recollection of young, impetuous days, how can he write with pen of gall these worse than churlish lines on Manfred? —

> "Projected from the bilious Childe,
> This clatterjaw his foot could set

On Alps, without a breast beguiled
To glow in shedding rascal sweat.
Somewhere about his grinder teeth
He mouthed of thoughts that grilled beneath,
And summoned Nature to her feud
With bile and buskin attitude."

There is more of this pretty poem, but I have quoted as much as my own irascibility can bear. I, at least, have been a child, and have spent some of my childhood's happiest hours with Manfred on the Alps; and have with him beheld

"the tall pines dwindled as to shrubs
In dizziness of distance,"

and have believed with all a child's sincerity in his remorseful gloom:—

"for I have ceased
To justify my deeds unto myself—
The last infirmity of evil."

Every line is inexpressibly dear to me now, recalling, as it does, the time "when I was in my father's house, and my path ran down with butter and honey." Once more I see the big, bare, old-fashioned parlor, to dust which was my daily task, my dear mother having striven long and vainly to teach my idle little hands some useful housewifely accomplishment. In

one corner stood a console-table, with chilly Parian ornaments on top, and underneath a pile of heavy books; Wordsworth, Moore, the poems of Frances Sargent Osgood, — no lack of variety here, — "The Lady of the Lake," and Byron in an embossed brown binding, with closely printed double columns, well calculated to dim the keenest sight in Christendom. Not that mysterious and malignant mountain which rose frowning from the sea, and drew all ships shattered to its feet, was more irresistible in its attraction than this brown, bulky Byron. I could not pass it by! My dusting never got beyond the table where it lay; but sitting crumpled on the floor, with the enchanted volume on my lap, I speedily forgot everything in the world save only the wandering Childe,

"Who ne in virtue's ways did take delight,"

or "The Corsair," or "Mazeppa," or "Manfred," best loved of that dark group. Perhaps Byron is not considered wholesome reading for little girls in these careful days when expurgated editions of "The Vicar of Wakefield" and "Paul and Virginia" find favor in our nurseries. On this score I have no defense to

offer, and I am not proposing the poet as a safe text-book for early youth; but having never been told that there was such a thing as forbidden fruit in literature, I was spared at least that alert curiosity concerning it which is one of the most unpleasant results of our present guarded system. Moreover, we have Goethe's word for it that Byron is not as immoral as the newspapers, and certainly he is more agreeable reading. I do sincerely believe that if part of his attraction for the young lies in what Mr. Pater calls "the grieved dejection, the endless regret," which to the undisciplined soul sounds like the true murmur of life, a better part lies in his large grasp of nature, — not nature in her minute and lovely detail, but in her vast outlines, her salient features, her solemn majesty and strength. Crags and misty mountain tops, storm-swept skies and the blue bosom of the restless deep, — these are the aspects of nature that childhood prizes, and loves to hear described in vigorous verse. The pink-tipped daisy, the yellow primrose, and the freckled nest-eggs

"Hatching in the hawthorn-tree"

belong to a late stage of development. Eugénie de Guérin, who recognized as clearly as Sainte-Beuve the "fine penetration" peculiar to children, and who regarded them ever with half-wistful, half-wondering delight, has written some very charming suggestions about the kind of poetry, "pure, fresh, joyous, and delicate," which she considered proper food for these highly idealized little people, — "angels upon earth." The only discouraging part of her pretty pleading is her frank admission that — in French literature, at least — there is no such poetry as she describes, which shows how hard it is to conciliate an exclusive theory of excellence. She endeavored sincerely, in her "Infantines," to remedy this defect, to "speak to childhood in its own language;" and her verses on "Joujou, the Angel of the Playthings," are quaintly conceived and full of gentle fancies. No child is strongly moved, or taught the enduring delight of song, by such lines as these, but most children will take a genuine pleasure in the baby angel who played with little Abel under the myrtle-trees, who made the first doll and blew the first bubble, and who finds a friend in every tiny boy and girl born into this

big gray world. Strange to say, he has his English counterpart in Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson's "Unseen Playmate," that shadowy companion whose home is the cave dug by childish hands, and who is ready to share all games in the most engaging spirit of accommodation.

"'T is he, when you play with your soldiers of tin,
That sides with the Frenchmen, and never can win;"

a touch of combative veracity which brings us down at once from Mademoiselle de Guérin's fancy flights to the real playground, where real children, very faintly resembling "angels upon earth," are busy with mimic warfare. Mr. Stevenson is one of the few poets whose verses, written especially for the nursery, have found their way straight into little hearts. His charming style, his quick, keen sympathy, and the ease with which he enters into that brilliant world of imagination wherein children habitually dwell, make him their natural friend and minstrel. If some of the rhymes in "A Child's Garden of Verses" seem a trifle bald and babyish, even these are guiltless of condescension; while others, like "Travel," "Shadow March," and "The Land of Story-

Books," are instinct with poetic life. I can only regret that a picture so faultless in detail as "Shadow March," where we see the crawling darkness peer through the window pane, and hear the beating of the little boy's heart as he creeps fearfully up the stair, should be marred at its close by a single line of false imagery: —

> "All the wicked shadows coming, tramp, tramp, tramp,
> With the black night overhead."

So fine an artist as Mr. Stevenson must know that shadows do not tramp, and that the recurrence of a short, vigorous word which tells so admirably in Scott's "William and Helen," and wherever the effect of sound combined with motion is to be conveyed, is sadly out of place in describing the ghostly things that glide with horrible noiselessness at the feet of the frightened lad. Children, moreover, are keenly alive to the value and the suggestiveness of terms. A little eight-year-old girl of my acquaintance, who was reciting "Lord Ullin's Daughter," stopped short at these lines, —

> "Adown the glen rode armed men,
> Their trampling sounded nearer," —

and called out excitedly, "Don't you hear the

horses?" She, at least, heard them as if with the swift apprehension of fear, heard them loud above the sounds of winds and waters, and rendered her unconscious tribute of praise to the sympathetic selection of words.

There is, as we know, a great deal of poetry written every year for childish readers. Some of it makes its appearance in Christmas books, which are so beautifully bound and illustrated that the little foolish, feeble verses are forgiven, and in fact forgotten, ignored altogether amid more important accessories. Better poems than these are published in children's periodicals, where they form a notable feature, and are, I dare say, read by the young people whose tastes are catered to in this fashion. Those of us who are familiar with these periodicals — either weeklies or monthlies — are well aware that the verses they offer may be easily divided into three classes. First, mere rhymes and jingles, intended for very little readers, and with which it would be simple churlishness to quarrel. They do not aspire to be poetry, they are sometimes very amusing, and they have an easy swing that is pleasant alike to young ears and old. It must be a hard heart

that does not sympathize with the unlucky and ill-mated gnome who was

> "full of fun and frolic,
> But his wife was melancholic;"

or with the small damsel in pigtail and pinafore who comforts herself at the piano with this engaging but dubious maxim: —

> "Practicing is good for a good little girl;
> It makes her nose straight, and it makes her hair curl."

The second kind of verse appears to be written solely for the sake of the accompanying illustration, and is often the work of the illustrator, who is more at home with his pencil than his pen. Occasionally it is comic, occasionally sentimental or descriptive; for the most part it is something in this style: —

THE ELF AND THE BUMBLE BEE.

> "Oh, bumble bee!
> Bumble bee!
> Don't fly so near!
> Or you will tumble me
> Over, I fear."
>
> "Oh, funny elf!
> Funny elf!
> Don't be alarmed!
> I am looking for honey, elf;
> You sha'n't be harmed."

"Then tarry,
Oh, tarry, bee!
Fill up your sack;
And carry, oh, carry me
Home on your back." [1]

Now what child will read more than once these empty little verses (very prettily illustrated) when it is in his power to turn back to other sprites that sing in different strains, — to the fairy who wanders

"Over hill, over dale,
Thorough bush, thorough briar,"

seeking pearl eardrops for the cowslips' ears; or to that softer shape, the music of whose song, once heard, haunts us forever: —

"Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange."

These are the sweet, mysterious echoes of true fairyland, where Shakespeare and little children wander at their will.

Poems of the third class are intended for growing girls and boys, and aspire to be

[1] Oliver Herford in *St. Nicholas.*

considered literature. They are well written, as a rule, with a smooth fluency that seems to be the distinguishing gift of our minor verse-makers, who, even when they have least to say, say it with unbroken sweetness and grace. This pretty, easy insignificance is much better adapted to adult readers, who demand little of poets beyond brevity, than to children, who love large issues, real passions, fine emotions, and an heroic attitude in life. Pleasant thoughts couched in pleasant language, trivial details, and photographic bits of description make no lasting appeal to the expansive imagination of a child. Analysis is wasted upon him altogether, because he sees things swiftly, and sees them as a whole. He may disregard fine shading and minute merits, but there are no boundaries to his wandering vision. "Small sciences are the labors of our manhood, but the round universe is the plaything of the boy."

The painful lack of distinction in most of the poetry prepared especially for him chills his fine ardor and dulls his imagination. Subtle verses about moods and tempers, calculated to make healthy little readers emu-

late Miss Martineau's peevish self-sympathy; melancholy verses about young children who suffer poverty and disaster; weird and unintelligible verses, with all Poe's indistinctness and none of his music; commonplace verses about bootblacks and newsboys; descriptive verses about snowstorms and April showers; pious verses about infant prigs; — verses of every kind, all on the same level of agreeable mediocrity, and all warranted to be so harmless that a baby could hear them without blushing. Why, the child who reads "Young Lochinvar" is richer in that one good and gallant poem than the child who has all these modern substitutes heaped yearly at his foolish feet.

For the question at issue is not what kind of poetry is wholesome for children, but what kind of poetry do children love. In nineteen cases out of twenty, that which they love is good for them, and they can guide themselves a great deal better than we can hope to guide them. I once asked a friend who had spent many years in teaching little girls and boys whether her small pupils, when left to their own discretion, ever chose any of the pretty,

trivial verses out of new books and magazines for study and recitation. She answered, Never. They turned instinctively to the same old favorites she had been listening to so long; to the same familiar poems that their fathers and mothers had probably studied and recited before them. "Hohenlinden," "Glenara," "Lord Ullin's Daughter," "Young Lochinvar," "Rosabelle," "To Lucasta, on going to the Wars," the lullaby from "The Princess," "Lady Clara Vere de Vere," "Annabel Lee," Longfellow's translation of "The Castle by the Sea," and "The Skeleton in Armor," — these are the themes of which children never weary; these are the songs that are sung forever in their secret Paradise of Delights. The little volumes containing such tried and proven friends grow shabby with much handling; and I have seen them marked all over with mysterious crosses and dots and stars, each of which denoted the exact degree of affection which the child bore to the poem thus honored and approved. I can fancy Mr. Lang's "Blue Poetry Book" fairly covered with such badges of distinction; for never before has any selection of poems appealed so clearly and insistently to

childish tastes and hearts. When I turn over its pages, I feel as if the children of England must have brought their favorite songs to Mr. Lang, and prayed, each one, that his own darling might be admitted, — as if they must have forced his choice into their chosen channels. Its only rival in the field, Palgrave's "Children's Treasury of English Song," is edited with such nice discrimination, such critical reserve, that it is well-nigh flawless, — a triumph of delicacy and good taste. But much that childhood loves is necessarily excluded from a volume so small and so carefully considered. The older poets, it is true, are generously treated, — Herrick, especially, makes a braver show than he does in Mr. Lang's collection; and there are plenty of beautiful ballads, some of which, like "The Lass of Lochroyan," we miss sorely from the pages of the "Blue Poetry Book." On the other hand, where, in Mr. Palgrave's "Treasury," are those lovely snatches of song familiar to our earliest years, and which we welcome individually with a thrill of pleasure, as Mr. Lang shows them to us once more? — "Rose Aylmer," "County Guy," "Proud Maisie,"

"How Sleep the Brave," "Nora's Vow," — the delight of my own childhood, — the pathetic "Farewell," —

> "It was a' for our rightfu' King,
> We left fair Scotland's strand;
> It was a' for our rightfu' King,
> We e'er saw Irish land," —

and Hood's silvery little verses beginning, —

> "A lake and a fairy boat
> To sail in the moonlight clear, —
> And merrily we would float
> From the dragons that watch us here!"

All these and many more are gathered safely into this charming volume. Nothing we long to see appears to be left out, except, indeed, Waller's "Go, Lovely Rose," and Herrick's "Night Piece," both of them very serious omissions. It seems strange to find seven of Edgar Poe's poems in a collection which excludes the "Night Piece," so true a favorite with all girl children, and a favorite that, once rightfully established, can never be thrust from our affections. As for Praed's "Red Fisherman," Mr. Lang has somewhere recorded his liking for this "sombre" tale, which, I think, embodies everything that a child ought not to love. It

is the only poem in the book that I wish elsewhere; but perhaps this is a perverse prejudice on my part. There may be little readers to whom its savage cynicism and gloom carry a pleasing terror, like that which oppressed my infant soul as I lingered with Goodman Brown in the awful witch-haunted forest where Hawthorne has shown us the triumph of evil things. "It is his excursions into the unknown world which the child enjoys," says Mr. Lang; and how shall we set a limit to his wanderings! He journeys far with careless, secure footsteps; and for him the stars sing in their spheres, and fairies dance in the moonlight, and the hoarse clashing of arms rings bravely from hard-won fields, and lovers fly together under the stormy skies. He rides with Lochinvar, and sails with Sir Patrick Spens into the northern seas, and chases the red deer with Allen-a-Dale, and stands by Marmion's side in the thick of the ghastly fray. He has given his heart to Helen of Troy, and to the Maid of Saragossa, and to the pale child who met her death on the cruel Gordon spears, and to the lady with yellow hair who knelt moaning by Barthram's bier. His friends are bold Robin

Hood, and Lancelot du Lac, and the white-plumed Henry of Navarre, and the princely scapegrace who robbed the robbers to make "laughter for a month, and a good jest forever." A lordly company these, and seldom to be found in the gray walks of middle age. Robin Hood dwells not on the Stock Exchange, and Prince Hal dare not show his laughing face before societies for leveling thrones and reorganizing the universe. We adults pass our days, alas, in the Town of Stupidity, — abhorred of Bunyan's soul, — and our companions are Mr. Worldly Wiseman, and Mr. Despondency, and Mr. Want-wit, still scrubbing his Ethiopian, and Mr. Feeble-mind, and the "deplorable young woman named Dull." But it is better to be young, and to see the golden light of romance in the skies, and to kiss the white feet of Helen, as she stands like a star on the battlements. It is better to follow Hector to the fight, and Guinevere to the sad cloisters of Almesbury, and the Ancient Mariner to that silent sea where the death-fires gleam by night. Even to us who have made these magic voyages in our childhood there comes straying, at times, a pale reflection

of that early radiance, a faint, sweet echo of that early song. Then the streets of the Town of Stupidity grow soft to tread, and Falstaff's great laugh frightens Mr. Despondency into a shadow. Then Madeline smiles on us under the wintry moonlight, and Porphyro steals by with strange sweets heaped in baskets of wreathed silver. Then we know that with the poets there is perpetual youth, and that for us, as for the child dreaming in the firelight, the shining casements open upon fairyland.

THE PRAISES OF WAR.

When the world was younger and perhaps merrier, when people lived more and thought less, and when the curious subtleties of an advanced civilization had not yet turned men's heads with conceit of their own enlightening progress from simple to serious things, poets had two recognized sources of inspiration, which were sufficient for themselves and for their unexacting audiences. They sang of love and they sang of war, of fair women and of brave men, of keen youthful passions and of the dear delights of battle. Sweet Rosamonde lingers "in Woodstocke bower," and Sir Cauline wrestles with the Eldridge knighte; Annie of Lochroyan sails over the roughening seas, and Lord Percy rides gayly to the Cheviot hills with fifteen hundred bowmen at his back. It did not occur to the thick-headed generation who first listened to the ballad of "Chevy Chace" to hint that the game was

hardly worth the candle, or that poaching on a large scale was as reprehensible ethically as poaching on a little one. This sort of insight was left for the nineteenth-century philosopher, and the nineteenth-century moralist. In earlier, easier days, the last thing that a poet troubled himself about was a defensible motive for the battle in which his soul exulted. His business was to describe the fighting, not to justify the fight, which would have been a task of pure supererogation in that truculent age. Fancy trying to justify Kinmont Willie or Johnie of Braedislee, instead of counting the hard knocks they give and the stout men they lay low!

"Johnie 's set his back against an aik,
His foot against a stane;
And he has slain the Seven Foresters, —
He has slain them a' but ane."

The last echo of this purely irresponsible spirit may be found in the "War Song of Dinas Vawr," where Peacock, always three hundred years behind his time, sings of slaughter with a bellicose cheerfulness which only his admirable versification can excuse: —

"The mountain sheep are sweeter,
But the valley sheep are fatter;

We therefore deemed it meeter
To carry off the latter.
We made an expedition;
We met an host and quelled it;
We forced a strong position,
And killed the men who held it."

There is not even a lack of food at home — the old traditional dinner of spurs — to warrant this foray. There is no hint of necessity for the harriers, or consideration for the harried.

"We brought away from battle,
And much their land bemoaned them,
Two thousand head of cattle,
And the head of him who owned them:
Ednyfed, King of Dyfed,
His head was borne before us;
His wine and beasts supplied our feasts,
And his overthrow our chorus."

It is impossible to censure a deed so irresistibly narrated; but if the lines were a hair-breadth less mellifluous, I think we should call this a very barbarous method of campaigning.

When the old warlike spirit was dying out of English verse, when poets had begun to meditate and moralize, to interpret nature and to counsel man, the good gods gave to England, as a link with the days that were dead,

Sir Walter Scott, who sang, as no Briton before or since has ever sung, of battlefields and the hoarse clashing of arms, of brave deeds and midnight perils, of the outlaw riding by Brignall banks, and the trooper shaking his silken bridle reins upon the river shore: —

> "Adieu for evermore,
> My love!
> And adieu for evermore."

These are not precisely the themes which enjoy unshaken popularity to-day, — "the poet of battles fares ill in modern England," says Sir Francis Doyle, — and as a consequence there are many people who speak slightingly of Scott's poetry, and who appear to claim for themselves some inscrutable superiority by so doing. They give you to understand, without putting it too coarsely into words, that they are beyond that sort of thing, but that they liked it very well as children, and are pleased if you enjoy it still. There is even a class of unfortunates who, through no apparent fault of their own, have ceased to take delight in Scott's novels, and who manifest a curious indignation because the characters in them go ahead and do things, instead of thinking and

talking about them, which is the present approved fashion of evolving fiction. Why, what time have the good people in "Quentin Durward" for speculation and chatter? The rush of events carries them irresistibly into action. They plot, and fight, and run away, and scour the country, and meet with so many adventures, and perform so many brave and cruel deeds, that they have no chance for introspection and the joys of analysis. Naturally, those writers who pride themselves upon making a story out of nothing, and who are more concerned with excluding material than with telling their tales, have scant liking for Sir Walter, who thought little and prated not at all about the "art of fiction," but used the subjects which came to hand with the instinctive and unhesitating skill of a great artist. The battles in "Quentin Durward" and "Old Mortality" are, I think, as fine in their way as the battle of Flodden; and Flodden, says Mr. Lang, is the finest fight on record, — "better even than the stand of Aias by the ships in the Iliad, better than the slaying of the Wooers in the Odyssey."

The ability to carry us whither he would, to

show us whatever he pleased, and to stir our hearts' blood with the story of

> "old, unhappy, far-off things,
> And battles long ago,"

was the especial gift of Scott, — of the man whose sympathies were as deep as life itself, whose outlook was as wide as the broad bosom of the earth he trod on. He believed in action, and he delighted in describing it. "The thinker's voluntary death in life" was not, for him, the power that moves the world, but rather deeds, — deeds that make history and that sing themselves forever. He honestly felt himself to be a much smaller man than Wellington. He stood abashed in the presence of the soldier who had led large issues and controlled the fate of nations. He would have been sincerely amused to learn from "Robert Elsmere" — what a delicious thing it is to contemplate Sir Walter reading "Robert Elsmere"! — that "the decisive events of the world take place in the intellect." The decisive events of the world, Scott held to take place in the field of action; on the plains of Marathon and Waterloo rather than in the brain tissues of William Godwin. He

knew what befell Athens when she could put forward no surer defense against Philip of Macedon than the most brilliant orations ever written in praise of freedom. It was better, he probably thought, to argue as the English did, "in platoons." The schoolboy who fought with the heroic "Green-Breeks" in the streets of Edinburgh; the student who led the Tory youths in their gallant struggle with the riotous Irishmen, and drove them with stout cudgeling out of the theatre they had disgraced; the man who, broken in health and spirit, was yet blithe and ready to back his quarrel with Gourgaud by giving that gentleman any satisfaction he desired, was consistent throughout with the simple principles of a bygone generation. "It is clear to me," he writes in his journal, "that what is least forgiven in a man of any mark or likelihood is want of that article blackguardly called *pluck*. All the fine qualities of genius cannot make amends for it. We are told the genius of poets especially is irreconcilable with this species of grenadier accomplishment. If so, *quel chien de génie!*"

Quel chien de génie indeed, and far beyond

the compass of Scott, who, amid the growing sordidness and seriousness of an industrial and discontented age, struck a single resonant note that rings in our hearts to-day like the echo of good and joyous things: —

> "Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife!
> To all the sensual world proclaim,
> One crowded hour of glorious life
> Is worth an age without a name."

The same sentiments are put, it may be remembered, into admirable prose when Graham of Claverhouse expounds to Henry Morton his views on living and dying. At present, Philosophy and Philanthropy between them are hustling poor Glory into a small corner of the field. Even to the soldier, we are told, it should be a secondary consideration, or perhaps no consideration at all, his sense of duty being a sufficient stay. But Scott, like Homer, held somewhat different views, and absolutely declined to let "that jade Duty" have everything her own way. It is the plain duty of Blount and Eustace to stay by Clare's side and guard her as they were bidden, instead of which they rush off, with Sir Walter's tacit approbation, to the fray.

"No longer Blount the view could bear:
'By heaven and all its saints! I swear
I will not see it lost!
Fitz-Eustace, you with Lady Clare
May bid your beads and patter prayer, —
I gallop to the host.'"

It was this cheerful acknowledgment of human nature as a large factor in life which gave to Scott his genial sympathy with brave, imperfect men; which enabled him to draw with true and kindly art such soldiers as Le Balafré, and Dugald Dalgetty, and William of Deloraine. Le Balafré, indeed, with his thick-headed loyalty, his conceit of his own wisdom, his unswerving, almost unconscious courage, his readiness to risk his neck for a bride, and his reluctance to marry her, is every whit as veracious as if he were the over-analyzed child of realism, instead of one of the many minor characters thrust with wanton prodigality into the pages of a romantic novel.

Alone among modern poets, Scott sings Homerically of strife. Others have caught the note, but none have upheld it with such sustained force, such clear and joyous resonance. Macaulay has fire and spirit, but he is always too rhetorical, too declamatory, for real emotion.

He stirs brave hearts, it is true, and the finest tribute to his eloquence was paid by Mrs. Browning, who said she could not read the "Lays" lying down; they drew her irresistibly to her feet. But when Macaulay sings of Lake Regillus, I do not see the battle swim before my eyes. I see — whether I want to or not — a platform, and the poet's own beloved schoolboy declaiming with appropriate gestures those glowing and vigorous lines. When Scott sings of Flodden, I stand wraith-like in the thickest of the fray. I know how the Scottish ranks waver and reel before the charge of Stanley's men, how Tunstall's stainless banner sweeps the field, and how, in the gathering gloom,

> "The stubborn spearmen still made good
> Their dark impenetrable wood,
> Each stepping where his comrade stood,
> The instant that he fell."

There is none of this noble simplicity in the somewhat dramatic ardor of Horatius, or in the pharisaical flavor, inevitable perhaps, but not the less depressing, of Naseby and Ivry, which read a little like old Kaiser William's war dispatches turned into verse. Better a thousand times are the splendid swing, the captivating

enthusiasm of Drayton's "Agincourt," which hardly a muck-worm could hear unstirred. Reading it, we are as keen for battle as were King Harry's soldiers straining at the leash. The ardor for strife, the staying power of quiet courage, all are here; and here, too, a felicity of language that makes each noble name a trumpet blast of defiance, a fresh incentive to heroic deeds.

"With Spanish yew so strong,
Arrows a cloth-yard long,
That like to serpents stung,
Piercing the weather;
None from his fellow starts,
But playing manly parts,
And like true English hearts,
Stuck close together.

. . . . . .

"Warwick in blood did wade,
Oxford the foe invade,
And cruel slaughter made,
Still as they ran up;
Suffolk his axe did ply,
Beaumont and Willoughby
Bare them right doughtily,
Ferrers and Fanhope.

"Upon Saint Crispin's day
Fought was this noble fray,
Which fame did not delay
To England to carry;

Oh, when shall Englishmen
With such acts fill a pen,
Or England breed again
Such a King Harry ? "

Political economists and chilly historians and all long-headed calculating creatures generally may perhaps hint that invading France was no part of England's business, and represented fruitless labor and bloodshed. But this, happily, is not the poet's point of view. He dreams with Hotspur

" Of basilisks, of cannon, culverin,
Of prisoners' ransom and of soldiers slain,
And all the 'currents of a heady fight."

He hears King Harry's voice ring clearly above the cries and clamors of battle : —

" Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more ;
Or close the wall up with our English dead ; "

and to him the fierce scaling of Harfleur and the field of Agincourt seem not only glorious but righteous things. "That pure and generous desire to thrash the person opposed to you because he *is* opposed to you, because he is not 'your side,'" which Mr. Saintsbury declares to be the real incentive of all good war songs, hardly permits a too cautious analysis of mo-

tives. Fighting is not a strictly philanthropic pastime, and its merits are not precisely the merits of church guilds and college settlements. Warlike saints are rare in the calendar, notwithstanding the splendid example of Michael, "of celestial armies, prince," and there is at present a shameless conspiracy on foot to defraud even St. George of his hard-won glory, and to melt him over in some modern crucible into a peaceful Alexandrian bishop. An Arian bishop, too, by way of deepening the scandal! We shall hear next that Saint Denis was a Calvinistic minister, and Saint Iago, whom devout Spanish eyes have seen mounted in the hottest of the fray, was a friendly well-wisher of the Moors.

But why sigh over fighting saints, in a day when even fighting sinners have scant measure of praise? "Moral courage is everything. Physical heroism is a small matter, often trivial enough," wrote that clever, emotional, sensitive German woman, Rahel Varnhagen, at the very time when a little "physical heroism" might have freed her conquered fatherland. And this profession of faith has gone on increasing in popularity, until we have even a

lad like the young Laurence Oliphant, with hot blood surging in his veins, gravely recording his displeasure because a parson "with a Crimean medal on his surplice" preached a rousing battle sermon to the English soldiers who had no alternative but to fight. "My natural man," confesses Oliphant naïvely, "is intensely warlike, which is just as low a passion as avarice or any other," — a curious moral perspective, which needs no word of comment, and sufficiently explains much that was to follow. We are irresistibly reminded by such a verdict of Shelley's swelling lines —

> "War is the statesman's game, the priest's delight,
> The lawyer's jest, the hired assassin's trade;"

lines which, to borrow a witticism of Mr. Oscar Wilde's, have "all the vitality of error," and will probably be quoted triumphantly by Peace Societies for many years to come.

In the mean time, there is a remarkable and very significant tendency to praise all war songs, war stories, and war literature generally, in proportion to the discomfort and horror they excite, in proportion to their inartistic and unjustifiable realism. I well remember, when I was a little girl, having a dismal

French tale by Erckmann-Chatrian, called "Le Conscrit," given me by a kindly disposed but mistaken friend, and the disgust with which I waded through those scenes of sordid bloodshed and misery, untouched by any fire of enthusiasm, any halo of romance. The very first description of Napoleon, — Napoleon, the idol of my youthful dreams, — as a fat, pale man, with a tuft of hair upon his forehead, filled me with loathing for all that was to follow. But I believe I finished the book, — it never occurred to me, in those innocent days, not to finish every book that I began, — and then I re-read in joyous haste all of Sir Walter Scott's fighting novels, "Waverley," "Old Mortality," "Ivanhoe," "Quentin Durward," and even "The Abbot," which has one good battle, to get the taste of that abominable story out of my mouth. Of late years, however, I have heard a great deal of French, Russian, and occasionally even English literature commended for the very qualities which aroused my childish indignation. No one has sung the praises of war more gallantly than Mr. Rudyard Kipling; yet those grim verses called "The Grave of the Hundred Dead" —

verses closely resembling the appalling specimens of truculency with which Mr. Ruskin began and ended his brief poetical career — have been singled out from their braver brethren for especial praise, and offered as "grim, naked, ugly truth" to those "who would know more of the poet's picturesque qualities."

But "grim, naked, ugly truth" can never be made a picturesque quality, and it is not the particular business of a battle poem to emphasize the desirability of peace. We all know the melancholy anticlimax of Campbell's splendid song "Ye Mariners of England," when, to three admirable verses, the poet must needs add a fourth, descriptive of the joys of harmony, and of the eating and drinking which shall replace the perils of the sea. I count it a lasting injury, after having my blood fired with these surging lines, —

> "Where Blake and mighty Nelson fell,
> Your manly hearts shall glow,
> As ye sweep through the deep,
> While the stormy winds do blow;
> While the battle rages loud and long,
> And the stormy winds do blow," —

to be suddenly introduced to a scene of inglo-

rious junketing; and I am not surprised that Campbell's peculiar inspiration, which was born of war and of war only, failed him the instant he deserted his theme. Such shocking lines as

> "The meteor-flag of England
> Shall yet terrific burn,"

while quite in harmony with the poet's ordinary achievements, would have been simply impossible in those first three verses of "Ye Mariners," where he remains true to his one artistic impulse. He strikes a different and a finer note when, in "The Battle of the Baltic," he turns gravely away from feasting and jollity to remember the brave men who have died for England's glory: —

> "Let us think of them that sleep,
> Full many a fathom deep,
> By thy wild and stormy steep,
> Elsinore!"

To go back to Mr. Rudyard Kipling, however, from whom I have wandered far, he is more in love with the "dear delights" of battle than with its dismal carnage, and he wins an easy forgiveness for a few horrors by showing us much brave and hearty fighting. Who can forget the little Gurkhas drawing a deep

breath of contentment when at last they see the foe, and gaping expectantly at their officers, "as terriers grin ere the stone is cast for them to fetch?" Who can forget the joyous abandon with which Mulvaney the disreputable and his "four an' twenty young wans" fling themselves upon Lungtungpen? It is a good and wholesome thing for a man to be in sympathy with that primitive virtue, courage, to recognize it promptly, and to do honor to it under any flag. "Homer's heart is with the brave of either side," observes Mr. Lang; "with Glaucus and Sarpedon of Lycia no less than with Achilles and Patroclus." Scott's heart is with Surrey and Dacre no less than with Lennox and Argyle; with the English hosts charging like whirlwinds to the fray no less than with the Scottish soldiers standing ringed and dauntless around their king. Théodore de Banville, hot with shame over fallen France, checks his bitterness to write some tender verses to the memory of a Prussian boy found dead on the field, with a bullet-pierced volume of Pindar on his breast. Dumas, that lover of all brave deeds, cries out with noble enthusiasm that it was not enough

to kill the Highlanders at Waterloo, — "we had to push them down!" and the reverse of the medal has been shown us by Mr. Lang in the letter of an English officer, who writes home that he would have given the rest of his life to have served with the French cavalry on that awful day. Sir Francis Doyle delights, like an honest and stout-hearted Briton, to pay an equal tribute of praise, in rather questionable verse, to the private of the Buffs,

> "Poor, reckless, rude, low-born, untaught,
> Bewildered and alone,"

who died for England's honor in a far-off land; and to the Indian prince, Mehrab Khan, who, brought to bay, swore proudly that he would perish,

> "to the last the lord
> Of all that man can call his own,"

and fell beneath the English bayonets at the door of his zenana. This is the spirit by which brave men know one another the world over, and which, lying back of all healthy national prejudices, unites in a human brotherhood those whom the nearness of death has taught to start at no shadows.

"Oh, east is east, and west is west, and never the two shall meet
Till earth and sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat.
But there is neither east nor west, border nor breed nor birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth."

Here is Mr. Kipling at his best, and here, too, is a link somewhat simpler and readier to hand than that much-desired bond of cultivation which Mr. Oscar Wilde assures us will one day knit the world together. The time when Germany will no longer hate France, "because the prose of France is perfect," seems still as far-off as it is fair; the day when "intellectual criticism will bind Europe together" dawns only in the dreamland of desire. Mr. Wilde makes himself merry at the expense of "Peace Societies, so dear to the sentimentalists, and proposals for unarmed International Arbitration, so popular among those who have never read history;" but criticism, the mediator of the future, "will annihilate race prejudices by insisting upon the unity of the human mind in the variety of its forms. If we are tempted to make war upon

another nation, we shall remember that we are seeking to destroy an element of our own culture, and possibly its most important element." This restraining impulse will allow us to fight only red Indians, and Feejeeans, and Bushmen, from whom no grace of culture is to be gleaned; and it may prove a strong inducement to some disturbed countries, like Ireland and Russia, to advance a little further along the paths of sweetness and light. Meanwhile, the world, which rolls so easily in old and well-worn ways, will probably remember that "power is measured by resistance," and will go on arguing stolidly in platoons.

"All healthy men like fighting and like the sense of danger; all brave women like to hear of their fighting and of their facing danger," says Mr. Ruskin, who has taken upon himself the defense of war in his own irresistibly unconvincing manner. Others indeed have delighted in it from a purely artistic standpoint, or as a powerful stimulus to fancy. Mr. Saintsbury exults more than most critics in battle poems, and in those "half-inarticulate songs that set the blood coursing." Sir Francis Doyle, whose simple manly soul never

wearied of such themes, had no ambition to outgrow the first hearty sympathies of his boyhood. "I knew the battle in 'Marmion' by heart almost before I could read," he writes in his "Reminiscences;" "and I cannot raze out — I do not wish to raze out — of my soul all that filled and colored it in years gone by." Mr. Froude, who is as easily seduced by the picturesqueness of a sea fight as was Canon Kingsley, appears to believe in all seriousness that the British privateers who went plundering in the Spanish main were inspired by a pure love for England, and a zeal for the Protestant faith. He can say truly with the little boy of adventurous humor, —

> "There is something that suits my mind to a T
> In the thought of a reg'lar Pirate King."

Mr. Lang's love of all warlike literature is too well known to need comment. As a child, he confesses he pored over "the fightingest parts of the Bible," when Sunday deprived him of less hallowed reading. As a boy, he devoted to Sir Walter Scott the precious hours which were presumably sacred to the shrine of Latin grammar. As a man, he lures us with glowing words from the consideration of politi-

cal problems, or of our own complicated spiritual machinery, to follow the fortunes of the brave, fierce men who fought in the lonely north, or of the heroes who went forth in gilded armor "to win glory or to give it" before the walls of Troy. In these days, when many people find it easier to read "The Ring and the Book" than the Iliad, Mr. Lang makes a strong plea in behalf of that literature which has come down to us out of the past to stand forevermore unrivaled and alone, stirring the hearts of all generations until human nature shall be warped from simple and natural lines. "With the Bible and Shakespeare," he says, "the Homeric poems are the best training for life. There is no good quality that they lack; manliness, courage, reverence for old age and for the hospitable hearth, justice, piety, pity, a brave attitude towards life and death, are all conspicuous in Homer." It might be well, perhaps, to add to this long list one more incomparable virtue, an instinctive and illogical delight in living. Amid shipwrecks and battles, amid long wanderings and hurtling spears, amid sharp dangers and sorrows bitter to bear, Homer teaches us, and teaches us in right joy-

ful fashion, the beauty and value of an existence which we profess nowadays to find a little burdensome on our hands.

All these things have the lovers of war said to us, and in all these ways have they striven to fire our hearts. But Mr. Ruskin is not content to regard any matter from a purely artistic standpoint, or to judge it on natural and congenital lines; he must indorse it ethically or condemn. Accordingly, it is not enough for him, as it would be for any other man, to claim that "no great art ever yet rose on earth but among a nation of soldiers." He feels it necessary to ask himself some searching and embarrassing questions about fighting "for its own sake," and as "a grand pastime," — questions which he naturally finds it extremely difficult to answer. It is not enough for him to say, with equal truth and justice, that if "brave death in a red coat" be no better than "brave life in a black one," it is at least every bit as good. He must needs wax serious, and commit himself to this strong and doubtful statement: —

"Assume the knight merely to have ridden out occasionally to fight his neighbor for exer-

cise; assume him even a soldier of fortune, and to have gained his bread and filled his purse at the sword's point. Still I feel as if it were, somehow, grander and worthier in him to have made his bread by sword play than any other play. I had rather he had made it by thrusting than by batting, — much more than by betting; much rather that he should ride war horses than back race horses; and — I say it sternly and deliberately — much rather would I have him slay his neighbor than cheat him."

Perhaps, in deciding a point as delicate as this, it would not be altogether amiss to consult the subject acted upon; in other words, the neighbor, who, whatever may be his prejudice against dishonest handling, might probably prefer it to the last irredeemable disaster. In this commercial age we get tolerably accustomed to being cheated — like the skinned eel, we are used to it, — but there is an old rhyme which tells us plainly that a broken neck is beyond all help of healing.

No, it is best, when we treat a theme as many-sided as war, to abandon modern inquisitorial methods, and confine ourselves to

that good old-fashioned simplicity which was content to take short obvious views of life. It is best to leave ethics alone, and ride as lightly as we may. The finest poems of battle and of camp have been written in this unincumbered spirit, as, for example, that lovely little snatch of song from "Rokeby:"—

"A weary lot is thine, fair maid,
A weary lot is thine!
To pull the thorn thy brow to braid,
And press the rue for wine.
A lightsome eye, a soldier's mien,
A feather of the blue,
A doublet of the Lincoln green,—
No more of me you knew,
My love!
No more of me you knew."

And this other, far less familiar, which I quote from Lockhart's Spanish Ballads, and which is fitly called "The Wandering Knight's Song:"—

"My ornaments are arms,
My pastime is in war,
My bed is cold upon the wold,
My lamp yon star.

"My journeyings are long,
My slumbers short and broken;
From hill to hill I wander still,
Kissing thy token.

"I ride from land to land,
I sail from sea to sea;
Some day more kind I fate may find,
Some night, kiss thee."

Now, apart from the charming felicity of these lines, we cannot but be struck with their singleness of conception and purpose. "The Wandering Knight" is well-nigh as disincumbered of mental as of material luggage. He rides as free from our tangled perplexity of introspection as from our irksome contrivances for comfort. It is not that he is precisely guileless or ignorant. One does not journey far over the world without learning the world's ways, and the ways of the men who dwell upon her. But the knowledge of things looked at from the outside is never the knowledge that wears one's soul away, and the traveling companion that Lord Byron found so *ennuyant*,

"The blight of life — the demon Thought,"

forms no part of the "Wandering Knight's" equipment. As I read this little fugitive song which has drifted down into an alien age, I feel an envious liking for those days when the tumult of existence made its triumph, when action fanned the embers of joy, and when

people were too busy with each hour of life, as it came, to question the usefulness or desirability of the whole.

There is one more point to consider. Mr. Saintsbury appears to think it strange that battles, when they occur, and especially when they chance to be victories, should not immediately inspire good war songs. But this is seldom or never the case, "The Charge of the Light Brigade" being an honorable exception to the rule. Drayton's heroic ballad was written nearly two hundred years after the battle of Agincourt; Flodden is a tale of defeat; and Campbell, whose songs are so intoxicatingly warlike, belonged, I am sorry to say, to the "Peace at all price" party. The fact is that a battle fought five hundred years ago is just as inspiring to the poet as a battle fought yesterday; and a brave deed, the memory of which comes down to us through centuries, stirs our hearts as profoundly as though we witnessed it in our own time. Sarpedon, leaping lightly from his chariot to dare an unequal combat; the wounded knight, Schönburg, dragging himself painfully from amid the dead and dying to offer his silver shield to

his defenseless emperor; the twenty kinsmen of the noble family of Trauttmansdorf who fell, under Frederick of Austria, in the single battle of Mühldorf; the English lad, young Anstruther, who carried the queen's colors of the Royal Welsh at the storming of Sebastopol, and who, swift-footed as a schoolboy, was the first to gain the great redoubt, and stood there one happy moment, holding his flagstaff and breathing hard, before he was shot dead, — these are the pictures whose value distance can never lessen, and whose colors time can never dim. These are the deeds that belong to all ages and to all nations, a heritage for every man who walks this troubled earth. "All this the gods have fashioned, and have woven the skein of death for men, that there might be a song in the ears even of the folk of after time."

LEISURE.

"Zounds! how has he the leisure to be sick?"

A VISITOR strolling through the noble woods of Ferney complimented Voltaire on the splendid growth of his trees. "Ay," replied the great wit, half in scorn and half, perhaps, in envy, "they have nothing else to do;" and walked on, deigning no further word of approbation.

Has it been more than a hundred years since this distinctly modern sentiment was uttered, — more than a hundred years since the spreading chestnut boughs bent kindly over the lean, strenuous, caustic, disappointed man of genius who always had so much to do, and who found in the doing of it a mingled bliss and bitterness that scorched him like fever pain? How is it that, while Dr. Johnson's sledge-hammer repartees sound like the sonorous echoes of a past age, Voltaire's remarks always appear to have been

spoken the day before yesterday? They are the kind of witticisms which we do not say for ourselves, simply because we are not witty; but they illustrate with biting accuracy the spirit of restlessness, of disquiet, of intellectual vanity and keen contention which is the brand of our vehement and over-zealous generation.

"The Gospel of Work" — that is the phrase woven insistently into every homily, every appeal made to the conscience or the intelligence of a people who are now straining their youthful energy to its utmost speed. "Blessed be Drudgery!" — that is the text deliberately chosen for a discourse which has enjoyed such amazing popularity that sixty thousand printed copies have been found all inadequate to supply the ravenous demand. Readers of Dickens — if any one has the time to read Dickens nowadays — may remember Miss Monflather's inspired amendment of that familiar poem concerning the Busy Bee: —

> "In work, work, work. In work alway,
> Let my first years be past."

And when our first years *are* past, the same programme is considered adequate and satis-

factory to the end. "A whole lifetime of horrid industry," — to quote Mr. Bagehot's uninspired words, — this is the prize dangled alluringly before our tired eyes; and if we are disposed to look askance upon the booty, then vanity is subtly pricked to give zest to faltering resolution. "Our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not;" they would be laggards in the field if our faults did not sometimes spur them to action. It is the pæan of self-glorification that wells up perpetually from press and pulpit, from public orators, and from what is courteously called literature, that keeps our courage screwed to the sticking place, and veils the occasional bareness of the result with a charitable vesture of self-delusion.

Work is good. No one seriously doubts this truth. Adam may have doubted it when he first took spade in hand, and Eve when she scoured her first pots and kettles; but in the course of a few thousand years we have learned to know and value this honest, troublesome, faithful, and extremely exacting friend. But work is not the only good thing in the world; it is not a fetich to be adored:

neither is it to be judged, like a sum in addition, by its outward and immediate results. The god of labor does not abide exclusively in the rolling-mill, the law courts, or the cornfield. He has a twin sister whose name is leisure, and in her society he lingers now and then to the lasting gain of both.

Sainte-Beuve, writing of Mme. de Sévigné and her time, says that we, "with our habits of positive occupation, can scarcely form a just conception of that life of leisure and chit-chat." "Conversations were infinite," admits Mme. de Sévigné herself, recalling the long summer afternoons when she and her guests walked in the charming woods of Les Rochers until the shadows of twilight fell. The whole duty of life seemed to be concentrated in the pleasant task of entertaining your friends when they were with you, or writing them admirable letters when they were absent. Occasionally there came, even to this tranquil and finely poised French woman, a haunting consciousness that there might be other and harder work for human hands to do. "Nothing is accomplished day by day," she writes, doubtfully; "and life is

made up of days, and we grow old and die." This troubled her a little, when she was all the while doing work that was to last for generations, work that was to give pleasure to men and women whose great-grandfathers were then unborn. Not that we have the time now to read Mme. de Sévigné! Why, there are big volumes of these delightful letters, and who can afford to read big volumes of anything, merely for the sake of the enjoyment to be extracted therefrom? It was all very well for Sainte-Beuve to say "Lisons tout Mme. de Sévigné," when the question arose how should some long idle days in a country-house be profitably employed. It was all very well for Sainte-Beuve to plead, with touching confidence in the intellectual pastimes of his contemporaries, "Let us treat Mme. de Sévigné as we treat Clarissa Harlowe, when we have a fortnight of leisure and rainy weather in the country." A fortnight of leisure and rainy weather in the country! The words would be antiquated even for Dr. Johnson. Rain may fall or rain may cease, but leisure comes not so lightly to our calling. Nay, Sainte-Beuve's wistful

amazement at the polished and cultivated inactivity which alone could produce such a correspondence as Mme. de Sévigné's is not greater than our wistful amazement at the critic's conception of possible idleness in bad weather. In one respect at least we follow his good counsel. We do treat Mme. de Sévigné precisely as we treat Clarissa Harlowe; that is, we leave them both severely alone, as being utterly beyond the reach of what we are pleased to call our time.

And what of the leisure of Montaigne, who, taking his life in his two hands, disposed of it as he thought fit, with no restless self-accusations on the score of indolence. In the world and of the world, yet always able to meet and greet the happy solitude of Gascony; toiling with no thought of toil, but rather "to entertaine my spirit as it best pleased," this man wrought out of time a coin which passes current over the reading world. And what of Horace, who enjoyed an industrious idleness, the bare description of which sets our hearts aching with desire! "The picture which Horace draws of himself in his country home," says an envious English critic,

"affords us a delightful glimpse of such literary leisure as is only possible in the golden days of good Haroun-Al-Raschid. Horace goes to bed and gets up when he likes; there is no one to drag him down to the law courts the first thing in the morning, to remind him of an important engagement with his brother scribes, to solicit his interest with Mæcenas, or to tease him about public affairs and the latest news from abroad. He can bury himself in his Greek authors, or ramble through the woody glens which lie at the foot of Mount Ustica, without a thought of business or a feeling that he ought to be otherwise engaged." "Swim smoothly in the stream of thy nature, and live but one man," counsels Sir Thomas Browne; and it may be this gentle current will bear us as bravely through life as if we buffeted our strength away in the restless ocean of endeavor.

Leisure has a value of its own. It is not a mere handmaid of labor; it is something we should know how to cultivate, to use, and to enjoy. It has a distinct and honorable place wherever nations are released from the pressure of their first rude needs, their first homely

toil, and rise to happier levels of grace and intellectual repose. "Civilization, in its final outcome," says the keen young author of "The Chevalier of Pensieri-Vani," "is heavily in the debt of leisure; and the success of any society worth considering is to be estimated largely by the use to which its *fortunati* put their spare moments." Here is a sentiment so relentlessly true that nobody wants to believe it. We prefer uttering agreeable platitudes concerning the blessedness of drudgery and the iniquity of eating bread earned by another's hands. Yet the creation of an artistic and intellectual atmosphere in which workers can work, the expansion of a noble sympathy with all that is finest and most beautiful, the jealous guardianship of whatever makes the glory and distinction of a nation; this is achievement enough for the *fortunati* of any land, and this is the debt they owe. It can hardly be denied that the lack of scholarship — of classical scholarship especially — at our universities is due primarily to the labor-worship which is the prevalent superstition of our day, and which, like all superstitions, has gradually degraded its

god into an idol, and lost sight of the higher powers and attributes beyond. The student who is pleased to think a knowledge of German "more useful" than a knowledge of Greek; the parent who deliberately declares that his boys have "no time to waste" over Homer; the man who closes the doors of his mind to everything that does not bear directly on mathematics, or chemistry, or engineering, or whatever he calls "work;" all these plead in excuse the exigencies of life, the absolute and imperative necessity of labor.

It would appear, then, that we have no *fortunati*, that we are not yet rich enough to afford the greatest of all luxuries — leisure to cultivate and enjoy "the best that has been known and thought in the world." This is a pity, because there seems to be money in plenty for so many less valuable things. The yearly taxes of the United States sound to innocent ears like the fabled wealth of the Orient; the yearly expenditures of the people are on no rigid scale; yet we are too poor to harbor the priceless literature of the past because it is not a paying investment, because it will not put bread in our mouths nor clothes on our shiver-

ing nakedness. "Poverty is a most odious calling," sighed Burton many years ago, and we have good cause to echo his lament. Until we are able to believe, with that enthusiastic Greek scholar, Mr. Butcher, that "intellectual training is an end in itself, and not a mere preparation for a trade or a profession;" until we begin to understand that there is a leisure which does not mean an easy sauntering through life, but a special form of activity, employing all our faculties, and training us to the adequate reception of whatever is most valuable in literature and art; until we learn to estimate the fruits of self-culture at their proper worth, we are still far from reaping the harvest of three centuries of toil and struggle; we are still as remote as ever from the serenity of intellectual accomplishment.

There is a strange pleasure in work wedded to leisure, in work which has grown beautiful because its rude necessities are softened and humanized by sentiment and the subtle grace of association. A little paragraph from the journal of Eugénie de Guérin illustrates with charming simplicity the gilding of common toil by the delicate touch of a cultivated and sympathetic intelligence: —

"A day spent in spreading out a large wash leaves little to say, and yet it is rather pretty, too, to lay the white linen on the grass, or to see it float on lines. One may fancy one's self Homer's Nausicaa, or one of those Biblical princesses who washed their brothers' tunics. We have a basin at Moulinasse that you have never seen, sufficiently large, and full to the brim of water. It embellishes the hollow, and attracts the birds who like a cool place to sing in."

In the same spirit, Maurice de Guérin confesses frankly the pleasure he takes in gathering fagots for the winter fire, "that little task of the woodcutter which brings us close to nature," and which was also a favorite occupation of M. de Lamennais. The fagot gathering, indeed, can hardly be said to have assumed the proportions of real toil; it was rather a pastime where play was thinly disguised by a pretty semblance of drudgery. "Idleness," admits de Guérin, "*but idleness full of thought, and alive to every impression.*" Eugénie's labors, however, had other aspects and bore different fruit. There is nothing intrinsically charming in stitching

seams, hanging out clothes, or scorching one's fingers over a kitchen fire; yet every page in the journal of this nobly born French girl reveals to us the nearness of work, work made sacred by the prompt fulfillment of visible duties, and — what is more rare — made beautiful by that distinction of mind which was the result of alternating hours of finely cultivated leisure. A very ordinary and estimable young woman might have spread her wash upon the grass with honest pride at the white ness of her linen; but it needed the solitude of Le Cayla, the few books, well read and well worth reading, the life of patriarchal simplicity, and the habit of sustained and delicate thought, to awaken in the worker's mind the graceful association of ideas, — the pretty picture of Nausicaa and her maidens cleansing their finely woven webs in the cool, rippling tide.

For it is self-culture that warms the chilly earth wherein no good seed can mature; it is self-culture that distinguishes between the work which has inherent and lasting value and the work which represents conscientious activity and no more. And for the training

of one's self, leisure is requisite; leisure and that rare modesty which turns a man's thoughts back to his own shortcomings and requirements, and extinguishes in him the burning desire to enlighten his fellow-beings. "We might make ourselves spiritual by detaching ourselves from action, and become perfect by the rejection of energy," says Mr. Oscar Wilde, who delights in scandalizing his patient readers, and who lapses unconsciously into something resembling animation over the wrongs inflicted by the solemn preceptors of mankind. The notion that it is worth while to learn a thing only if you intend to impart it to others is widespread and exceedingly popular. I have myself heard an excellent and anxious aunt say to her young niece, then working hard at college, "But, my dear, why do you give so much of your time to Greek? You don't expect to teach it, do you?" — as if there were no other use to be gained, no other pleasure to be won from that noble language, in which lies hidden the hoarded treasure of centuries. To study Greek in order to read and enjoy it, and thereby make life better worth the living,

is a possibility that seldom enters the practical modern mind.

Yet this restless desire to give out information, like alms, is at best a questionable bounty; this determination to share one's wisdom with one's unwilling fellow-creatures is a noble impulse provocative of general discontent. When Southey, writing to James Murray about a dialogue which he proposes to publish in the "Quarterly," says, with characteristic complacency: "I have very little doubt that it will excite considerable attention, and lead many persons into a wholesome train of thought," we feel at once how absolutely familiar is the sentiment, and how absolutely hopeless is literature approached in this spirit. The same principle, working under different conditions to-day, entangles us in a network of lectures, which have become the chosen field for every educational novelty, and the diversion of the mentally unemployed.

Charles Lamb has recorded distinctly his veneration for the old-fashioned schoolmaster who taught his Greek and Latin in leisurely fashion day after day, with no thought wasted upon more superficial or practical acquirements,

and who "came to his task as to a sport." He has made equally plain his aversion for the new-fangled pedagogue — new in his time, at least — who could not "relish a beggar or a gypsy" without seeking to collect or to impart some statistical information on the subject. A gentleman of this calibre, his fellow-traveler in a coach, once asked him if he had ever made "any calculation as to the value of the rental of all the retail shops in London?" and the magnitude of the question so overwhelmed Lamb that he could not even stammer out a confession of his ignorance. "To go preach to the first passer-by, to become tutor to the ignorance of the first thing I meet, is a task I abhor," observes Montaigne, who must certainly have been the most acceptable companion of his day.

Dr. Johnson, too, had scant sympathy with insistent and arrogant industry. He could work hard enough when circumstances demanded it; but he "always felt an inclination to do nothing," and not infrequently gratified his desires. "No man, sir, is obliged to do as much as he can. A man should have part of his life to himself," was the good doctor's

soundly heterodox view, advanced upon many occasions. He hated to hear people boast of their assiduity, and nipped such vain pretensions in the bud with frosty scorn. When he and Boswell journeyed together in the Harwich stage-coach, a "fat, elderly gentle-woman," who had been talking freely of her own affairs, wound up by saying that she never permitted any of her children to be for a moment idle. "I wish, madam," said Dr. Johnson testily, "that you would educate me too, for I have been an idle fellow all my life." "I am sure, sir," protested the woman with dismayed politeness, "you have not been idle." "Madam," was the retort, "it is true! And that gentleman there" — pointing to poor young Boswell — "has been idle also. He was idle in Edinburgh. His father sent him to Glasgow, where he continued to be idle. He came to London, where he has been very idle. And now he is going to Utrecht, where he will be as idle as ever."

That there was a background of truth in these spirited assertions we have every reason to be grateful. Dr. Johnson's value to-day does not depend on the number of essays, or

reviews, or dedications he wrote in a year, — some years he wrote nothing, — but on his own sturdy and splendid personality; "the real primate, the soul's teacher of all England," says Carlyle; a great embodiment of uncompromising goodness and sense. Every generation needs such a man, not to compile dictionaries, but to preserve the balance of sanity, and few generations are blest enough to possess him. As for Boswell, he might have toiled in the law courts until he was gray without benefiting or amusing anybody. It was in the nights he spent drinking port wine at the Mitre, and in the days he spent trotting, like a terrier, at his master's heels, that the seed was sown which was to give the world a masterpiece of literature, the most delightful biography that has ever enriched mankind. It is to leisure that we owe the "Life of Johnson," and a heavy debt we must, in all integrity, acknowledge it to be.

Mr. Shortreed said truly of Sir Walter Scott that he was "making himself in the busy, idle pleasures of his youth;" in those long rambles by hill and dale, those whimsical adventures at farmhouses, those merry, pur-

poseless journeys in which the eager lad tasted the flavor of life. At home such unauthorized amusements were regarded with emphatic disapprobation. "I greatly doubt, sir," said his father to him one day, "that you were born for nae better than a gangrel scrape-gut!" and one half pities the grave clerk to the Signet, whose own life had been so decorously dull, and who regarded with affectionate solicitude his lovable and incomprehensible son. In later years Sir Walter recognized keenly that his wasted school hours entailed on him a lasting loss, a loss he was determined his sons should never know. It is to be forever regretted that "the most Homeric of modern men could not read Homer." But every day he stole from the town to give to the country, every hour he stole from law to give to literature, every minute he stole from work to give to pleasure, counted in the end as gain. It is in his pleasures that a man really lives, it is from his leisure that he constructs the true fabric of self. Perhaps Charles Lamb's fellow-clerks thought that because his days were spent at a desk in the East India House, his life was spent there too. His life was far

remote from that routine of labor; built up of golden moments of respite, enriched with joys, chastened by sorrows, vivified by impulses that had no filiation with his daily toil. "For the time that a man may call his own," he writes to Wordsworth, "that is his life." The Lamb who worked in the India House, and who had "no skill in figures," has passed away, and is to-day but a shadow and a name. The Lamb of the "Essays" and the "Letters" lives for us now, and adds each year his generous share to the innocent gayety of the world. This is the Lamb who said, "Riches are chiefly good because they give us time," and who sighed for a little son that he might christen him Nothing-to-do, and permit him to do nothing.

WORDS.

"Do you read the dictionary?" asked M. Théophile Gautier of a young and ardent disciple who had come to him for counsel. "It is the most fruitful and interesting of books. Words have an individual and a relative value. They should be chosen before being placed in position. This word is a mere pebble; that a fine pearl or an amethyst. In art the handicraft is everything, and the absolute distinction of the artist lies, not so much in his capacity to feel nature, as in his power to render it."

We are always pleased to have a wholesome truth presented to us with such genial vivacity, so that we may feel ourselves less edified than diverted, and learn our lesson without the mortifying consciousness of ignorance. He is a wise preceptor who conceals from us his awful rod of office, and grafts his knowledge dexterously upon our self-esteem.

"Men must be taught as if you taught them not,
And things unknown proposed as things forgot."

An appreciation of words is so rare that everybody naturally thinks he possesses it, and this universal sentiment results in the misuse of a material whose beauty enriches the loving student beyond the dreams of avarice. Musicians know the value of chords; painters know the value of colors; writers are often so blind to the value of words that they are content with a bare expression of their thoughts, disdaining the "labor of the file," and confident that the phrase first seized is for them the phrase of inspiration. They exaggerate the importance of what they have to say, — lacking which we should be none the poorer, — and underrate the importance of saying it in such fashion that we may welcome its very moderate significance. It is in the habitual and summary recognition of the laws of language that scholarship delights, says Mr. Pater; and while the impatient thinker, eager only to impart his views, regards these laws as a restriction, the true artist finds in them an opportunity, and rejoices, as Goethe rejoiced, to work within conditions and limits.

For every sentence that may be penned or spoken the right words exist. They lie concealed in the inexhaustible wealth of a vocabulary enriched by centuries of noble thought and delicate manipulation. He who does not find them and fit them into place, who accepts the first term which presents itself rather than search for the expression which accurately and beautifully embodies his meaning, aspires to mediocrity, and is content with failure. The exquisite adjustment of a word to its significance, which was the instrument of Flaubert's daily martyrdom and daily triumph; the generous sympathy of a word with its surroundings, which was the secret wrung by Sir Thomas Browne from the mysteries of language, — these are the twin perfections which constitute style, and substantiate genius. Cardinal Newman also possesses in an extraordinary degree Flaubert's art of fitting his words to the exact thoughts they are designed to convey. Such a brief sentence as "Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt" reveals with pregnant simplicity the mental attitude of the writer. Sir Thomas Browne, working under fewer restraints, and without

the severity of intellectual discipline, harmonizes each musical syllable into a prose of leisurely sweetness and sonorous strength. "Court not felicity too far, and weary not the favorable hand of fortune." "Man is a noble animal, splendid in ashes, and pompous in the grave." "The race of delight is short, and pleasures have mutable faces." Such sentences, woven with curious skill from the rich fabric of seventeenth-century English, defy the wreckage of time. In them a gentle dignity of thought finds its appropriate expression, and the restfulness of an unvexed mind breathes its quiet beauty into each cadenced line. Here are no "boisterous metaphors," such as Dryden scorned, to give undue emphasis at every turn, and amaze the careless reader with the cheap delights of turbulence. Here is no trace of that "full habit of speech," hateful to Mr. Arnold's soul, and which, in the years to come, was to be the gift of journalism to literature.

The felicitous choice of words, which with most writers is the result of severe study and unswerving vigilance, seems with a favored few — who should be envied and not imitated

—to be the genuine fruit of inspiration, as though caprice itself could not lead them far astray. Shelley's letters and prose papers teem with sentences in which the beautiful words are sufficient satisfaction in themselves, and of more value than the conclusions they reveal. They have a haunting sweetness, a pure perfection, which makes the act of reading them a sustained and dulcet pleasure. Sometimes this effect is produced by a few simple terms reiterated into lingering music. "We are born, and our birth is unremembered, and our infancy remembered but in fragments; we live on, and in living we lose the apprehension of life." Sometimes a clearer note is struck with the sure and delicate touch which is the excellence of art. "For the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness." The substitution of the word "glow" for "brightness" would, I think, make this sentence extremely beautiful. If it lacks the fullness and melody of those incomparable passages in which Burke, the great master of words, rivets our admiration forever, it has the same peculiar and lasting

hold upon our imaginations and our memories. Once read, we can no more forget its charm than we can forget "that chastity of honor which felt a stain like a wound," or the mournful cadence of regret over virtues deemed superfluous in an age of strictly iconoclastic progress. "Never more shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom." It is the fashion at present to subtly depreciate Burke's power by some patronizing allusion to the "grand style," — a phrase which, except when applied to Milton, appears to hold in solution an undefined and undefinable reproach. But until we can produce something better, or something as good, those "long savorsome Latin words," checked and vivified by "racy Saxon monosyllables," must still represent an excellence which it is easier to belittle than to emulate.

It is strange that our chilling disapprobation of what we are prone to call "fine writing" melts into genial applause over the

freakish perversity so dear to modern unrest. We look askance upon such an old-time master of his craft as the Opium-Eater, and require to be told by a clear-headed, unenthusiastic critic like Mr. George Saintsbury that the balanced harmony of De Quincey's style is obtained often by the use of extremely simple words, couched in the clearest imaginable form. Place by the side of Mr. Pater's picture of Monna Lisa — too well known to need quotation — De Quincey's equally famous description of Our Lady of Darkness. Both passages are as beautiful as words can make them, but the gift of simplicity is in the hands of the older writer. Or take the single sentence which describes for us the mystery of Our Lady of Sighs: "And her eyes, if they were ever seen, would be neither sweet nor subtle; no man could read their story; they would be found filled with perishing dreams, and with wrecks of forgotten delirium." Here, as Mr. Saintsbury justly points out, are no needless adjectives, no unusual or extravagant words. The sense is adequate to the sound, and the sound is only what is required as accompaniment to the sense. We are not

perplexed and startled, as when Browning introduces us to

"the Tyrrhene whelk's pearl-sheeted lip,"

or to a woman's

"morbid, olive, faultless shoulder-blades."

We are not irritated and confused, as when Carlyle — whose misdeeds, like those of Browning, are matters of pure volition — is pleased, for our sharper discipline, to write "like a comet inscribing with its tail." No man uses words more admirably, or abuses them more shamefully, than Carlyle. That he should delight in seeing his pages studded all over with such spikes as "mammonism," "flunkeyhood," "nonentity," and "simulacrum," that he should repeat them again and again with unwearying self-content, is an enigma that defies solution, save on the simple presumption that they are designed, like other instruments of torture, to test the fortitude of the sufferer. It is best to scramble over them as bravely as we can, and forget our scars in the enjoyment of those vivid and matchless pictures in which each word plays its part, and supplies its share of outline and emphasis

to the scene. The art that can dictate such a brief bit of description as "little red-colored pulpy infants," is the art of a Dutch master who, on five inches of canvas, depicts for us with subdued vehemence the absolute realities of life.

"All freaks," remarks Mr. Arnold, "tend to impair the beauty and power of language;" yet so prone are we to confuse the bizarre with the picturesque that at present a great deal of English literature resembles a linguistic museum, where every type of monstrosity is cheerfully exhibited and admired. Writers of splendid capacity, of undeniable originality and force, are not ashamed to add their curios to the group, either from sheer impatience of restraint, or, as I sometimes think, from a grim and perverted sense of humor, which is enlivened by noting how far they can venture beyond bounds. When Mr. George Meredith is pleased to tell us that one of his characters "neighed a laugh," that another "tolled her naughty head," that a third "stamped; her aspect spat," and that a fourth was discovered "pluming a smile upon his succulent mouth," we cannot smother a dawning suspicion that

he is diverting himself at our expense, and pluming a smile of his own, more sapless than succulent, over the naïve simplicity of the public. Perhaps it is a yearning after subtlety rather than a spirit of uncurbed humor which prompts Vernon Lee to describe for us Carlo's "dark Renaissance face perplexed with an incipient laugh;" but really a very interesting and improving little paper might be written on the extraordinary laughs and smiles which cheer the somewhat saturnine pages of modern analytic fiction. "Correctness, that humble merit of prose," has been snubbed into a recognition of her insignificance. She is as tame as a woman with only one head and two arms amid her more striking and richly endowed sisters in the museum.

"A language long employed by a delicate and critical society," says Mr. Walter Bagehot, "is a treasure of dexterous felicities;" and to awaken the literary conscience to its forgotten duty of guarding this treasure is the avowed vocation of Mr. Pater, and of another stylist, less understood and less appreciated, Mr. Oscar Wilde. Their labors are scantily rewarded in an age which has but little in-

stinct for form, and which habitually allows itself the utmost license of phraseology. That "unblessed freedom from restraint," which to the clear-eyed Greeks appeared diametrically opposed to a wise and well-ordered liberty, and which finds its amplest expression in the poems of Walt Whitman, has dazzled us only to betray. The emancipation of the savage is sufficiently comprehensive, but his privileges are not always as valuable as they may at first sight appear. Mr. Brownell, in his admirable volume "French Traits," unhesitatingly defines Whitman's slang as "the riotous medium of the under-languaged;" and the reproach is not too harsh nor too severe. Even Mr. G. C. Macaulay, one of the most acute and enthusiastic of his English critics, admits sadly that it is "gutter slang," equally purposeless and indefensible. That a man who held within himself the elements of greatness should have deliberately lessened the force of his life's work by a willful misuse of his material is one of those bitter and irremediable errors which sanity forever deplores. We are inevitably repelled by the employment of trivial or vulgar words in serious

poetry, and they become doubly offensive when brought into relation with the beauty and majesty of nature. It is neither pleasant nor profitable to hear the sun's rays described as

"scooting obliquely high and low."

It is still less satisfactory to have the universe addressed in this convivial and burlesque fashion: —

"Earth, you seem to look for something at my hands;
Say, old Topknot, what do you want?"

There is a kind of humorousness which a true sense of humor would render impossible; there is a species of originality from which the artist shrinks aghast; and worse than mere vulgarity is the constant employment of words indecorous in themselves, and irreverent in their application, — the smirching of clean and noble things with adjectives grossly unfitted for such use, and repellent to all the canons of good taste. This is not the "gentle pressure" which Sophocles put upon common words to wring from them a fresh significance; it is a deliberate abuse of terms, and betrays a lack of that fine quality of self-repression which embraces the power of selection, and is

the best characteristic of literary morality. "Oh, for the style of honest men!" sighs Sainte-Beuve, sick of such unreserved disclosures; "of men who have revered everything worthy of respect, whose innate feelings have ever been governed by the principles of good taste. Oh, for the polished, pure, and moderate writers!"

There is a pitiless French maxim, less popular with English and Americans than with our Gallic neighbors, — "Le secret d'ennuyer est de tout dire." Mr. Pater indeed expresses the same thought in ampler English fashion (which but emphasizes the superiority of the French) when he says, "For in truth all art does but consist in the removal of surplusage, from the last finish of the gem-engraver blowing away the last particle of invisible dust, back to the earliest divination of the finished work to be, lying somewhere, according to Michelangelo's fancy, in the rough-hewn block of stone." That the literary artist tests his skill by a masterly omission of all that is better left unsaid is a truth widely admitted and scantily utilized. Authors who have not taken the trouble *de faire leur toilette* admit

us with painful frankness into their dressing-rooms, and suffer us to gaze more intimately than is agreeable to us upon the dubious mysteries of their deshabille. Authors who have the gift of continuity disregard with insistent generosity the limits of time and patience. What a noble poem was lost to myriads of readers when "The Ring and the Book" reached its twenty thousandth line! How inexorable is the tyranny of a great and powerful poet who will spare his readers nothing! Authors who are indifferent to the beauties of reserve charge down upon us with a dreadful impetuosity from which there is no escape. The strength that lies in delicacy, the chasteness of style which does not abandon itself to every impulse, are qualities ill-understood by men who subordinate taste to fervor, and whose words, coarse, rank, or unctuous, betray the undisciplined intellect that mistakes passion for power. "The language of poets," says Shelley, "has always effected a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound, without which it were not poetry;" and it is the sustained effort to secure this balanced harmony, this magnificent work within

limits, which constitutes the achievement of the poet, and gives beauty and dignity to his art. "Where is the man who can flatter himself that he knows the language of prose, if he has not assiduously practiced the language of poetry?" asks M. Francisque Sarcey, whose requirements are needlessly exacting, but whose views would have been cordially indorsed by at least one great master of English. Dryden always maintained that the admirable quality of his prose was due to his long training in a somewhat mechanical verse. A more modern and diverting approximation of M. Sarcey's views may be found in the robust statement of Benjamin Franklin: "I approved, for my part, the amusing one's self now and then with poetry, so far as to improve one's language, but no farther." It is a pity that people cannot always be born in the right generation! What a delicious picture is presented to our fancy of a nineteenth-century Franklin amusing himself and improving his language by an occasional study of "Sordello"!

The absolute mastery of words, which is the prerogative of genius, can never be acquired

by painstaking, or revealed to criticism. Mr. Lowell, pondering deeply on the subject, has devoted whole pages to a scholarly analysis of the causes which assisted Shakespeare to his unapproached and unapproachable vocabulary. The English language was then, Mr. Lowell reminds us, a living thing, "hot from the hearts and brains of a people; not hardened yet, but moltenly ductile to new shapes of sharp and clear relief in the moulds of new thought. Shakespeare found words ready to his use, original and untarnished, types of thought whose edges were unworn by repeated impressions. . . . No arbitrary line had been drawn between high words and low; vulgar then meant simply what was common; poetry had not been aliened from the people by the establishment of an Upper House of vocables. The conception of the poet had no time to cool while he was debating the comparative respectability of this phrase or that; but he snatched what word his instinct prompted, and saw no indiscretion in making a king speak as his country nurse might have taught him."

It is a curious thing, however, that the more we try to account for the miracles of genius,

the more miraculous they grow. We can never hope to understand the secret of Homer's style. It is best to agree simply with Mr. Pater: "Homer was always saying things in this manner." We can never know how Keats came to write,

> "With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,"

or those other lines, perhaps the most beautiful in our language,

> "Magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

It is all a mystery, hidden from the uninspired, and Mr. Lowell's clean-built scaffolding, while it helps us to a comprehensive enjoyment of Shakespeare, leaves us dumb and amazed as ever before the concentrated splendor of a single line,—

> "In cradle of the rude, imperious surge."

There is only one way to fathom its conception. The great waves reared their foamy heads, and whispered him the words.

The richness of Elizabethan English, the freedom and delight with which men sounded and explored the charming intricacies of a tongue that was expanding daily into fresh

majesty and beauty, must have given to literature some of the allurements of navigation. Mariners sailed away upon stormy seas, on strange, half-hinted errands; haunted by the shadow of glory, dazzled by the lustre of wealth. Scholars ventured far upon the unknown ocean of letters; haunted by the seductions of prose, dazzled by the fairness of verse. They brought back curious spoils, gaudy, subtle, sumptuous, according to the taste or potency of the discoverer. Their words have often a mingled weight and sweetness, whether conveying briefly a single thought, like Burton's "touched with the loadstone of love," or adding strength and lustre to the ample delineations of Ben Jonson. "Give me that wit whom praise excites, glory puts on, or disgrace grieves; he is to be nourished with ambition, pricked forward with honors, checked with reprehension, and never to be suspected of sloth." Bacon's admirable conciseness, in which nothing is disregarded, but where every word carries its proper value and expresses its exact significance, is equaled only by Cardinal Newman. "Reading maketh a full man, conference a

ready man, and study an exact man," says Bacon; and this simple accuracy of definition reminds us inevitably of the lucid terseness with which every sentence of the "Apologia" reveals the thought it holds. "The truest expedience is to answer right out when you are asked; the wisest economy is to have no management; the best prudence is not to be a coward." As for the *naïveté* and the picturesqueness which lend such inexpressible charm to the earlier writers and atone for so many of their misdeeds, what can be more agreeable than to hear Sir Walter Raleigh remark with cheerful ingenuousness, "Some of our captaines garoused of wine till they were reasonable pleasant"! — a most engaging way of narrating a not altogether uncommon occurrence. And what can be more winning to the ear than the simple grace with which Roger Ascham writes of familiar things: "In the whole year, Springtime, Summer, Fall of the Leaf, and Winter; and in one day, Morning, Noontime, Afternoon, and Eventide, altereth the course of the weather, the pith of the bow, the strength of the man"! It seems an easy thing to say "fall of the leaf" for fall, and

"eventide" for evening, but in such easy things lies the subtle beauty of language; in the rejection of such nice distinctions lies the barrenness of common speech. We can hardly spare the time, in these hurried days, to speak of the fall of the leaf, to use four words where one would suffice, merely because the four words have a graceful significance, and the one word has none; and so, even in composition, this finely colored phrase, with its hint of russet, wind-swept woods, is lost to us forever. Yet compare with it the line which Lord Tennyson, that great master of beautiful words, puts into Marian's song: —

> "'Have you still any honey, my dear?'
> She said, 'It 's the fall of the year;
> But come, come!'"

How tame and gray is the idiom which conveys a fact, which defines a season, but suggests nothing to our imaginations, by the side of the idiom which brings swiftly before our eyes the brilliant desolation of autumn!

The narrow vocabulary, which is the conversational freehold of people whose education should have provided them a broader field, admits of little that is picturesque or forcible,

and of less that is finely graded or delicately conceived. Ordinary conversation appears to consist mainly of "ands," "buts," and "thes," with an occasional "well" to give a flavor of nationality, a "yes" or "no" to stand for individual sentiment, and a few widely exaggerated terms to destroy value and perspective.

Is this, one wonders, the "treasure of dexterous felicities" which Mr. Bagehot contemplated with such delight, and which a critical society is destined to preserve flawless and uncontaminated? Is this the "heroic utterance," the great "mother tongue," possessing which we all become — or so Mr. Sydney Dobell assures us —

"Lords of an empire wide as Shakespeare's soul,
Sublime as Milton's immemorial theme,
And rich as Chaucer's speech and fair as Spenser's dream"?

Is this the element whose beauty excites Mr. Oscar Wilde to such rapturous and finely worded praise, — praise which awakens in us a noble emulation to prove what we can accomplish with a medium at once so sumptuous and so flexible? "For the material that painter or sculptor uses is meagre in comparison with language," says Mr. Wilde. "Words

have not merely music as sweet as that of viol and lute, color as rich and vivid as any that makes lovely for us the canvas of the Venetian or the Spaniard, and plastic form no less sure and certain than that which reveals itself in marble or in bronze; but thought and passion and spirituality are theirs also, are theirs indeed alone. If the Greeks had criticised nothing but language, they would still have been the great art critics of the world. To know the principles of the highest art is to know the principles of all the arts."

This is not claiming too much, for in truth Mr. Wilde is sufficiently well equipped to illustrate his claim. If his sentences are sometimes overloaded with ornament, the decorations are gold, not tinsel; if his vocabulary is gorgeous, it is never glaring; if his allusions are fanciful, they are controlled and subdued into moderation. Even the inevitable and swiftly uttered reproach of "fine writing" cannot altogether blind us to the fact that his are beautiful words, — pearls and amethysts M. Gautier would call them, — aptly chosen, and fitted into place with the careful skill of a goldsmith. They are

free, moreover, from that vice of unexpectedness which is part of fine writing, and which Mr. Saintsbury finds so prevalent among the literary workers of to-day; the desire to surprise us by some new and profoundly irrelevant application of a familiar word. The "veracity" of a bar of music, the finely executed "passage" of a marble chimney-piece, the "andante" of a sonnet, and the curious statement, commonly applied to Mr. Gladstone, that he is "part of the conscience of a nation," — these are the vagaries which to Mr. Saintsbury, and to every other student of words, appear so manifestly discouraging. Mr. James Payn tells a pleasant story of an æsthetic sideboard which was described to him as having a Chippendale feeling about it, before which touching conceit the ever famous "fringes of the north star" pale into insignificance. A recent editor of Shelley's letters and essays says with seeming seriousness in his preface that the "Witch of Atlas" is a "characteristic outcome," an "exquisite mouse of fancy brought forth by what mountain of Shelleyan imagination." Now, when a careful student and an appreciative reader

can bring himself to speak of a poem as a "mouse of fancy," merely for the sake of forcing a conceit, and confronting us with the perils of the unexpected, it is time we turned soberly back to first principles and to our dictionaries; it is time we listened anew to M. Gautier's advice, and studied the value of words.

ENNUI.

"Tous les genres sont permis, hors le genre ennuyeux."

"WANT and ennui," says Schopenhauer, "are the two poles of human life." The further we escape from one evil, the nearer we inevitably draw to the other. As soon as the first rude pressure of necessity is relieved, and man has leisure to think of something beyond his unsatisfied craving for food and shelter, then ennui steps in and claims him for her own. It is the price he pays, not merely for luxury, but for comfort. Time, the inexorable taskmaster of poor humanity, drives us hard with whip and spur when we are struggling under the heavy burden of work; but stays his hand, and prolongs the creeping hours, when we are delivered over to that weariness of spirit which weights each moment with lead. Time is, in fact, either our open oppressor or our false friend. He is that agent by which, at every instant, "all things in our hands

become as nothing, and lose any real value they possess."

Here is a doctrine distinctly discouraging, and stated with that relentless candor which compels our reluctant consideration. There can be no doubt that to Schopenhauer's mind ennui was an evil every whit as palpable as want. He hated and feared them both with the painful susceptibility of a self-centred man; and he strove resolutely from his youth to protect himself against these twin disasters of life. The determined fashion in which he guarded his patrimony from loss resembled the determined fashion in which he strove — with less success — to guard himself from boredom. The vapid talk, the little wearisome iterations, which most of us bear resignedly enough because custom has taught us patience, were to him intolerable afflictions. He retaliated by an ungracious dismissal of society as something pitiably and uniformly contemptible. His advice has not the grave and simple wisdom of Sir Thomas Browne, "Be able to be alone," but is founded rather on Voltaire's disdainful maxim, "The world is full of people who are not worth speaking to," and implies

an almost savage rejection of one's fellow-beings. "Every fool is pathetically social," says Schopenhauer, and the advantage of solitude consists less in the possession of ourselves than in the escape from others. With whimsical eagerness he built barrier after barrier between himself and the dreaded enemy, ennui, only to see his citadel repeatedly stormed, and to find himself at the mercy of his foe. There is but one method, after all, by which the invader can be even partially disarmed, and this method was foreign to Schopenhauer's nature. It was practiced habitually by Sir Walter Scott, who, in addition to his sustained and splendid work, threw himself with such unselfish, unswerving ardor into the interests of his brother men that he never gave them a thorough chance to bore him. They did their part stoutly enough, and were doubtless as tiresome as they knew how to be; but his invincible sweet temper triumphed over their malignity, and enabled him to say, in the evening of his life, that he had suffered little at their hands, and had seldom found any one from whom he could not extract either amusement or edification.

Perhaps his journal tells a different tale, a tale of heavy moments stretching into hours, and borne with cheerful patience out of simple consideration for others. Men and women, friends and strangers, took forcible possession of his golden leisure, and he yielded it to them without a murmur. That which was well-nigh maddening to Carlyle's irritable nerves and selfish petulance, and which strained even Charles Lamb's forbearance to the snapping-point, Sir Walter endured smilingly, as if it were the most reasonable thing in the world. Mr. Lang is right when he says Scott did not preach socialism, he practiced it; that is, he never permitted himself to assign to his own comfort or convenience a very important place in existence; he never supposed his own satisfaction to be the predestined purpose of the universe. But his love for genial life, his keen enjoyment of social pleasures, made him singularly sensitive to ennui. He was able, indeed, like Sir Thomas Browne, to be alone, — when the charity of his fellow-creatures suffered it, — and he delighted in diverting companionship, whether of peers or hinds; but the weariness of daily intercourse with stupid

people told as heavily upon him as upon less patient victims. Little notes scattered throughout his journal reveal his misery, and awaken sympathetic echoes in every long-tried soul. "Of all bores," he writes, "the greatest is to hear a dull and bashful man sing a facetious song." And again, with humorous intensity: "Miss Ayton's father is a bore, after the fashion of all fathers, mothers, aunts, and other chaperons of pretty actresses." And again, this time in a hasty scrawl to Ballantyne: —

> "Oh, James! oh, James! two Irish dames
> Oppress me very sore:
> I groaning send one sheet I 've penned,
> For, hang them! there 's no more."

That Sir Walter forgot his sufferings as soon as they were over is proof, not of callousness, but of magnanimity. He forgave his tormentors the instant they ceased to torment him, and then found time to deplore his previous irritation. "I might at least have asked him to dinner," he was heard murmuring self-reproachfully, when an unscrupulous intruder had at last departed from Abbotsford; and on another occasion, when some impatient lads refused to emulate his forbearance, he recalled

them with prompt insistence to their forgotten sense of propriety. "Come, come, young gentlemen," he expostulated. "It requires no small ability, I assure you, to be a decided bore. You must endeavor to show a little more respect."

The self-inflicted pangs of ennui are less salutary and infinitely more onerous than those we suffer at the hands of others. It is natural that our just resentment when people weary us should result in a temporary taste for solitude, a temporary exaltation of our own society. Like most sentiments erected on an airy trestle-work of vanity, this is an agreeable delusion while it lasts; but it seldom does last after we are bold enough to put it to the test. The inevitable and rational discontent which lies at the bottom of our hearts is not a thing to be banished by noise, or lulled to sleep by silence. We are not sufficient for ourselves, and companionship is not sufficient for us. "Venez, monsieur," said Louis XIII. to a listless courtier; "allons nous ennuyer ensemble." We fancy it is the detail of life, its small grievances, its apparent monotony, its fretful cares, its hours alternately lagging and feverish, that

wear out the joy of existence. This is not so. Were each day differently filled, the result would be much the same. Young Maurice de Guérin, struggling with a depression he too clearly understands, strikes at the very root of the matter in one dejected sentence: "Mon Dieu, que je souffre de la vie! Non dans ses accidents, un peu de philosophie y suffit; mais dans elle-même, dans sa substance, à part tout phénomène." To which the steadfast optimist opposes an admirable retort: "It is a pity that M. de Guérin should have permitted himself this relentless analysis of a misery which is never bettered by contemplation." Happiness may not be, as we are sometimes told, the legacy of the barbarian, but neither is it a final outcome of civilization. Men can weary, and do weary, of every stage that represents a step in the world's progress, and the ennui of mental starvation is equaled only by the ennui of mental satiety.

It is curious how much of this temper is reflected in the somewhat dispiriting literature which attains popularity to-day. Mr. Hamlin Garland, whose leaden-hued sketches called — I think unfairly — "Main-Travelled Roads"

have deprived most of us of some cheerful hours, paints with an unfaltering hand a life in which ennui sits enthroned. It is not the poverty of his Western farmers that oppresses us. Real biting poverty, which withers lesser evils with its deadly breath, is not known to these people at all. They have roofs, fire, food, and clothing. It is not the ceaseless labor, the rough fare, the gray skies, the muddy barnyards, which stand for the trouble in their lives. It is the dreadful weariness of living. It is the burden of a dull existence, clogged at every pore, and the hopeless melancholy of which they have sufficient intelligence to understand. Theirs is the ennui of emptiness, and the implied reproach on every page is that a portion, and only a portion, of mankind is doomed to walk along these shaded paths; while happier mortals who abide in New York, or perhaps in Paris, spend their days in a pleasant tumult of intellectual and artistic excitation. The clearest denial of this fallacy may be found in that matchless and desolate sketch of Mr. Pater's called "Sebastian van Storck," where we have painted for us with penetrating distinctness man's delib-

erate rejection of those crowded accessories which, to the empty-handed, represent the joys of life. Never has the undying essence of ennui been revealed to our unwilling gaze as in this merciless picture. Never has it been so portrayed in its awful nakedness, amid a plenty which it cannot be persuaded to share. We see the rich, warm, highly colored surroundings, the vehement intensity of work and pastime, the artistic completeness of every detail, the solicitations of love, the delicate and alluring touches which give to every day its separate delight, its individual value; and, amid all these things, the impatient soul striving vainly to adjust itself to a life which seems so worth the living. Here, indeed, is one of "Fortune's favorites," whom she decks with garlands like a sacrificial heifer, and at whom, unseen, she points her mocking finger. Encompassed from childhood by the "thriving genius" of the Dutch, by the restless activity which made dry land and populous towns where nature had willed the sea, and by the admirable art which added each year to the heaped-up treasures of Holland, Sebastian van Storck has but one vital impulse which

shapes itself to an end, — escape; escape from an existence made unendurable by its stifling fullness, its vivid and marvelous accomplishment.

It is an interesting question to determine, or to endeavor to determine, how far animals share man's melancholy capacity for ennui. Schopenhauer, who, like Hartmann and all other professional pessimists, steadfastly maintains that beasts are happier than men, is disposed to believe that in their natural state they never suffer from this malady, and that, even when domesticated, only the most intelligent give any indication of its presence. But how does Schopenhauer know that which he so confidently affirms? The bird, impelled by an instinct she is powerless to resist, sits patiently on her eggs until they are hatched; but who can say she is not weary of the pastime? What loneliness and discontent may find expression in the lion's dreadful roar, which is said to be as mournful as it is terrible! We are naturally tempted, in moments of fretfulness and dejection, to seek relief — not unmixed with envy — in contemplating with Sir Thomas Browne "the happiness of inferior creatures

who in tranquillity possess their constitutions." But freedom from care, and from the apprehension that is worse than care, does not necessarily imply freedom from all disagreeable sensations; and the surest claim of the brute to satisfaction, its absolute adequacy to the place it is designed to fill, is destroyed by our interference in its behalf. As a result, domestic pets reveal plainly to every close observer how frequently they suffer from ennui. They pay, in smaller coin, the same price that man pays for comfortable living. Mr. Ruskin has written with ready sympathy of the house dog, who bears resignedly long hours of dull inaction, and only shows by his frantic delight what a relief it is to be taken out for the mild dissipation of a stroll. I have myself watched and pitied the too evident ennui of my cat, poor little beast of prey, deprived in a mouseless home of the supreme pleasures of the hunt; fed until dinner ceases to be a coveted enjoyment; housed, cushioned, combed, caressed, and forced to bear upon her pretty shoulders the burden of a wearisome opulence, — or what represents opulence to a pussy. I have seen Agrippina listlessly moving from

chair to chair, and from sofa to sofa, in a vain attempt to nap; looking for a few languid minutes out of the window with the air of a great lady sadly bored at the play; and then turning dejectedly back into the room whose attractions she had long since exhausted. Her expressive eyes lifted to mine betrayed her discontent; the lassitude of an irksome luxury unnerved her graceful limbs; if she could have spoken, it would have been to complain with Charles Lamb of that "dumb, soporifical good-for-nothingness" which clogs the wheels of life.

It is a pleasant fancy, baseless and proofless, which makes us imagine the existence of fishes to be peculiarly tranquil and unmolested. The element in which they live appears to shelter them from so many evils; noises especially, and the sharpness of sudden change, scorching heats, and the inclement skies of winter. A delightful mystery wraps them round, and the smooth apathy with which they glide through the water suggests content approaching to complacency. That old-fashioned poem beginning

> "Deep in the wave is a coral grove,
> Where the purple mullet and goldfish rove,"

filled my childish heart with a profound envy of these happy creatures, which was greatly increased by reading a curious story of Father Faber's, called "The Melancholy Heart." In this tale, a little shipwrecked girl is carried to the depths of the ocean, and sees the green sea swinging to and fro because it is so full of joy, and the fishes waving their glistening fins in silent satisfaction, and the oysters opening and shutting their shells in lazy raptures of delight. Afterwards she visits the birds and beasts and insects, and finds amongst them intelligence, industry, patience, ingenuity, — a whole host of admirable qualities, — but nowhere else the sweet contentment of that dumb watery life. So universal is this fallible sentiment that even Leopardi, while assigning to all created things their full share of pain, reluctantly admits that the passive serenity of the less vivacious creatures of the sea — starfish and their numerous brothers and sisters — is the nearest possible approach to an utterly impossible happiness. And indeed it is difficult to look at a sea-urchin slowly moving its countless spines in the clear shallow water without thinking that here, at least, is an existence

equally free from excitability and from ennui; here is a state of being sufficient for itself, and embracing all the enjoyment it can hold. The other side of the story is presented when we discover the little prickly cup lying empty and dry on the peak of a neighboring rock, and know that a crow's sharp beak has relentlessly dug the poor urchin from its comfortable cradle, and ended its slumbrous felicity. Yet the sudden cessation of life has nothing whatever to do with its reasonable contentment. The question is, not how soon is it over, or how does it come to an end, but is it worth living while it lasts? Moreover, the chances of death make the sweetness of self-preservation; and this is precisely the sentiment which Leigh Hunt has so admirably embodied in those lines — the finest, I think, he ever wrote — where the fish pleads for its own pleasant and satisfactory existence: —

> "A cold, sweet, silver life, wrapped in round waves,
> Quickened with touches of transporting fear."

Here, as elsewhere, fear is the best antidote for ennui. The early settlers of America, surrounded by hostile Indians, and doubtful each morning whether the coming nightfall would

not see their rude homes given to the flames, probably suffered but little from the dullness which seems so oppressive to the peaceful agriculturist of to-day. The mediæval women, who were content to pass their time in weaving endless tapestries, had less chance to complain of the monotony of life than their artistic, scientific, literary, and philanthropic sisters of our age; for at any hour, breaking in upon their tranquil labors, might be heard the trumpet's blast; at any hour might come the tidings, good or bad, which meant a few more years of security, or the horrors of siege and pillage.

It is pleasant to turn our consideration from the ennui which is inevitable, and consequently tragic, to the ennui which is accidental, and consequently diverting. The first is part of ourselves, from which there is no escape; the second is, as a rule, the contribution of our neighbors, and may be eluded if fortune and our own wits favor us. Lord Byron, for example, finding himself hard beset by Madame de Staël, whom he abhorred, had the dexterity to entrap poor little "Monk" Lewis into the conversation, and then slipped away from both,

leaving them the dismally congenial task of wearying each other without mercy. "A bore," says Bishop Selwyn, "is a man who will persist in talking about himself when you want to talk about yourself;" and this simple explanation offers a satisfactory solution of much of the ennui suffered in society. People with theories of life are, perhaps, the most relentless of their kind, for no time or place is sacred from their devastating elucidations. A theoretic socialist — not the practical working kind, like Sir Walter — is adamant to the fatigue of his listeners. "Eloquence," says Mr. Lowell feelingly, "has no bowels for its victims;" and one of the most pathetic figures in the history of literature is poor Heine, awakened from his sweet morning nap by Ludwig Börne, who sat relentlessly on the edge of the bed and talked patriotism. I hardly think that even this wanton injury justified Heine in his cruel attack upon Börne, when the latter was dead and could offer no defense; yet who knows how many drops of concentrated bitterness were stored up in those dreary moments of boredom! The only other instance of ennui which seems as grievous and as cruel is the picture

of the Baron Fouqué's brilliant wife condemned to play loto every evening with the officers of the victorious French army; an illustration equally novel and malign of the devastating inhumanity of war.

In fact, amusements which do not amuse are among the most depressing of earthly evils. When Sir George Cornwall Lewis candidly confessed that life would be tolerable were it not for its pleasures, he had little notion that he was uttering a witticism fated to enjoy a melancholy immortality. His protest was purely personal, and society, prompt to recognize a grievance when it is presented, has gone on ever since peevishly and monotonously echoing his lament. We crave diversion so eagerly, we need it so sorely, that our disappointment in its elusiveness is fed by the flickerings of perpetual hope. Ennui has been defined as a desire for activity without the capacity for action, as a state of inertia quickened by discontent. But it is rather a desire for amusement than for activity; it is a rational instinct warped by the irony of circumstances, and by our own selfish limitations. It was not activity that Schopenhauer lacked. He worked

hard all his life, and with the concentrated industry of a man who knew exactly what he wanted to do. It was the common need of enjoyment, which he shared with the rest of mankind, and his own singular incapacity for enjoying himself, which chafed him into bitterness, and made him so unreasonably angry with the world. "In human existence," says Leopardi, "the intervals between pleasure and pain are occupied by ennui. And since all pleasures are like cobwebs, exceedingly fragile, thin, and transparent, ennui penetrates their tissue and saturates them, just as air penetrates the webs. It is, indeed, nothing but a yearning for happiness, without the illusion of pleasure or the reality of pain. This yearning is never satisfied, since true happiness does not exist. So that life is interwoven with weariness and suffering, and one of these evils disappears only to give place to the other. Such is the destiny of man."

Now, to endure pain resolutely, courage is required; to endure ennui, one must be bred to the task. The restraints of a purely artificial society are sufferable to those only whom custom has rendered docile, and who have been

trained to subordinate their own impulses and desires. The more elaborate the social conditions, the more relentless this need of adjustment, which makes a harmonious whole at the cost of individual development. We all know how, when poor Frances Burney was lifted suddenly from the cheerful freedom of middle-class life to the wearisome etiquette of a court, she drooped and fretted under the burden of an honor which brought her nothing but vexation. Macaulay, who champions her cause with burning zeal, is pleased to represent the monotony of court as simple slavery with no extenuating circumstances. He likens Dr. Burney conducting his daughter to the palace to a Circassian father selling his own child into bondage. The sight of the authoress of "Evelina" assisting at the queen's toilet, or chatting sleepily with the ladies in waiting, thrills him with indignation; the thought of her playing cards night after night with Madame Schwellenberg reduces him to despair. And indeed, card-playing, if you have not the grace to like it, is the most unprofitable form of social martyrdom; you suffer horribly yourself, and you add very little to

the pleasure of your neighbor. The Baroness Fouqué may have conquered the infantine imbecilities of loto with no great mental exhaustion. If she were painfully bored, her patience alone was taxed. The Frenchmen probably thought her a pleased and animated companion. But Miss Burney, delicate, sleepy, fatigued, loathing cards, and inwardly rebellious at her fate, must have made the game drag sadly before bedtime. It was a dreary waste of moments for her; but a less intolerant partisan than Macaulay would have some sympathy to spare for poor Madame Schwellenberg, who, like most women of rank, adored the popular pastime, and who doubtless found the distinguished young novelist a very unsatisfactory associate.

It is salutary to turn from Miss Burney and her wrathful historian to the letters of Charlotte Elizabeth, mother of the Regent d'Orléans, and see how the oppressive monotony of the French court was cheerfully endured for fifty years by a woman exiled from home and kindred, whose pleasures were few, whose annoyances were manifold. Madame would have enjoyed nothing better than a bowl of beer,

soup, or a dish of sausages eaten in congenial company. She lunched daily alone, on hated French messes, stared at by twenty footmen, from whose supercilious eyes she was glad to escape with hunger still unsatisfied. Madame detested sermons. She listened to them endlessly without complaint, and was grateful for the occasional privilege of a nap. Madame liked cards. She was not permitted to play, nor even to show herself at the lansquenet table. She never gambled, — in fact, she had no money, — and it was a fancy of her husband's that she brought him ill luck by hovering near. Neither was she allowed to retire. "All the old women who do not play have to be entertained by me," she writes with surpassing good humor. "This goes on from seven to ten, and makes me yawn frightfully." Supper was eaten at the royal table, where the guests often waited three quarters of an hour for the king to appear, and where nobody spoke a word during the meal. "I live as though I were quite alone in the world," confesses this friendless exile to her favorite correspondent, the Raugravine Louise. "But I am resigned to such a state of things, and

I meddle in nothing." Here was a woman trained to the endurance of ennui. The theatre and the chase were her sole amusements; letter-writing was her only occupation. Her healthy German nature had in it no trace of languor, no bitterness born of useless rebellion against fate. She knew how to accept the inevitable, and how to enjoy the accidental; and this double philosophy afforded her something closely resembling content. Napoleon, it is said, once desired some comedians to play at court, and M. de Talleyrand gravely announced to the audience waiting to hear them, "Gentlemen, the emperor earnestly requests you to be amused." Had Charlotte Elizabeth — long before laid to sleep in St. Denis — been one of that patient group, she would have literally obeyed the royal commands. She would have responded with prompt docility to any offered entertainment. This is not an easy task. "Amuse me, if you can find out how to do it," was the melancholy direction of Richelieu to Boisrobert, when the pains of ennui grew unbearable, and even kittens ceased to be diverting. Amuse! amuse! amuse! is the plea of a weariness as wide as the world, and

as old as humanity. Amuse me for a little while, that I may think I have escaped from myself.

It is curious that England should have to borrow from France the word "ennui," while the French are unanimous in their opinion that the thing itself is emphatically of English growth. The old rhyme,

"Jean Rosbif écuyer,
Qui pendit soi-même pour se désennuyer,"

has never lost its application, though the present generation of English-speaking men are able to digest a great deal of dullness without seeking such violent forms of relief. In fact, Mr. Oscar Wilde, prompt to offer an unwelcome criticism, explains the amazing popularity of the psychological and religiously irreligious novel on the ground that the *genre ennuyeux*, which no Frenchman can bring himself to pardon, is the one form of literature which his countrymen thoroughly enjoy. They have a kindly tolerance for stupid people as well, and the ill-natured term "bore" has only forced itself of late years upon an urbane and long-suffering public. Johnson's dictionary is innocent of the word, though Johnson

himself was well acquainted with the article. As late as 1822, a reviewer in "Colburn's Magazine" entreats his readers to use the word "bore;" to write it, if they please; to print it, even, if necessary. Why shrink from the expression, when the creature itself is so common, and "daily gaining ground in the country"?

Before this date, however, one English writer had given to literature some priceless illustrations of the species. "Could we but study our bores as Miss Austen must have studied hers in her country village," says Mrs. Ritchie, "what a delightful world this might be!" But I seriously doubt whether any real enjoyment could be extracted from Miss Bates, or Mr. Rushworth, or Sir William Lucas, in the flesh. If we knew them, we should probably feel precisely as did Emma Woodhouse, and Maria Bertram, and Elizabeth Bennet, — vastly weary of their company. In fact, only their brief appearances make the two gentlemen bores so diverting, even in fiction; and Miss Bates, I must confess, taxes my patience sorely. She is so tiresome that she tires, and I am invariably tempted to do

what her less fortunate townspeople would have gladly done, — run away from her to more congenial society. Surely comedy ceases, and tragedy begins, when poor Jane Fairfax escapes from the strawberry party at Donwell, and seeks, under the burning noonday sun, the blessed relief of solitude. "We all know at times what it is to be wearied in spirits. Mine, I admit, are exhausted," is the confession wrung from the silent lips of a girl who has borne all that human nature can bear from Miss Bates's affectionate solicitude. Perhaps the best word ever spoken upon the creation of such characters in novels comes from Cardinal Newman. "It is very difficult," he says, "to delineate a bore in a narrative, for the simple reason that he is a bore. A tale must aim at condensation, but a bore acts in solution. It is only in the long run that he is ascertained." And when he *is* ascertained, and his identity established beyond reach of doubt, what profit have we in his desolating perfections? Miss Austen was far from enjoying the dull people whom she knew in life. We have the testimony of her letters to this effect. Has not Mrs. Stent, otherwise lost to

fame, been crowned with direful immortality as the woman who bored Jane Austen? "We may come to be Mrs. Stents ourselves," she writes, with facile self-reproach at her impatience, "unequal to anything, and unwelcome to anybody;" an apprehension manifestly manufactured out of nothingness to strengthen some wavering purpose of amendment. Stupidity is acknowledged to be the one natural gift which cannot be cultivated, and Miss Austen well knew it lay beyond her grasp. With as much sincerity could Emma Woodhouse have said, "I may come in time to be a second Miss Bates."

There is a small, compact, and enviable minority among us, who, through no merit of their own, are incapable of being bored, and consequently escape the endless pangs of ennui. They are so clearly recognized as a body that a great deal of the world's work is prepared especially for their entertainment and instruction. Books are written for them, sermons are preached to them, lectures are given to them, papers are read to them, societies and clubs are organized for them, discussions after the order of Melchizedek are carried on

monotonously in their behalf. A brand new school of fiction has been invented for their exclusive diversion; and several complicated systems of religion have been put together for their recent edification. It is hardly a matter of surprise that, fed on such meats, they should wax scornful, and deride their hungry fellow-creatures. It is even less amazing that these fellow-creatures should weary from time to time of the crumbs that fall from their table. It is told of Pliny the younger that, being invited to a dinner, he consented to come on the express condition that the conversation should abound in Socratic discourses. Here was a man equally insensible to ennui and to the sufferings of others. The guests at that ill-starred banquet appear to have been sacrificed as ruthlessly as the fish and game they ate. They had not even the loophole of escape which Mr. Bagehot contemplates so admiringly in Paradise Lost. Whenever Adam's remarks expand too obviously into a sermon, Eve, in the most discreet and wife-like manner, steps softly away, and refreshes herself with slumber. Indeed, when we come to think of it, conversation between these two must have

been difficult at times, because they had nobody to talk about. If we exiled our neighbors permanently from our discussions, we should soon be reduced to silence; and if we confined ourselves even to laudatory remarks, we should probably say but little. Miss Frances Power Cobbe, who is uncompromisingly hostile to the feeble vices of society, insists that it is the duty of every woman to look bored when she hears a piece of scandal; but this mandate is hardly in accord with Miss Cobbe's other requisite for true womanhood, absolute and undeviating sincerity. How can she look bored when she does not feel bored, unless she plays the hypocrite? And while many women are shocked and repelled by scandal, few, alas! are wont to find it tiresome. I have not even observed any exceeding weariness in men when subjected to a similar ordeal. In that pitiless dialogue of Landor's between Catherine of Russia and Princess Dashkov, we find some opinions on this subject stated with appalling candor. "Believe me," says the empress, "there is nothing so delightful in life as to find a liar in a person of repute. Have you never heard

good folks rejoicing at it? Or rather, can you mention to me any one who has not been in raptures when he could communicate such glad tidings? The goutiest man would go on foot to tell his friend of it at midnight; and would cross the Neva for the purpose, when he doubted whether the ice would bear him." Here, indeed, is the very soul and essence of ennui; not the virtuous sentiment which revolts at the disclosure of another's faults, but that deep and deadly ennui of life which welcomes evil as a distraction. The same selfish lassitude which made the gladiatorial combats a pleasant sight for the jaded eyes which witnessed them finds relief for its tediousness today in the swift destruction of confidence and reputation.

There is a curious and melancholy fable of Leopardi's in which he seeks to explain what always puzzled him sorely, the continued endurance of life. In the beginning, he says, the gods gave to men an existence without care, and an earth without evil. The world was small, and easily traversed. No seas divided it, no mountains rose frowning from its bosom, no extremes of heat or cold afflicted

its inhabitants. Their wants were supplied, their pleasures provided; their happiness, Jove thought, assured. For a time all things went well; but as the human race outgrew its infancy, it tired of this smooth perfection, and little by little there dawned upon men the inherent worthlessness of life. Every day they sounded its depths more clearly, and every day they wearied afresh of all they knew and were. Illusions vanished, and the insupportable pains of ennui forced them to cast aside a gift in which they found no value. They desired death, and sought it at their own hands.

Then Jove, half in wrath and half in pity, devised a means by which his rebellious creatures might be preserved. He enlarged the earth, moulded the mountains, and poured into mighty hollows the restless and pitiless seas. Burning heat and icy cold he sent, diseases and dangers of every kind, craving desires that could never be satisfied, vain ambitions, a babble of many tongues, and the deep-rooted animosities of nations. Gone was the old tranquillity, vanished the old ennui. A new race, struggling amid terrible hardships, fought

bravely and bitterly for the preservation of an existence they had formerly despised. Man found his life filled with toil, sweetened by peril, checked by manifold disasters, and was deluded into cherishing at any cost that which was so painful to sustain. The greater the difficulties and dangers, the more he opposed to them his own indomitable purpose, the more determined he was to live. The zest of perpetual effort, the keenness of contention, the brief, sweet triumph over adversity, — these left him neither the time nor the disposition to question the value of all that he wrung from fate.

It is a cheerless philosophy, but not without value to the sanguine socialist of to-day, who dreams of preparing for all of us a lifetime of unbroken ennui.

WIT AND HUMOR.

It is dubious wisdom to walk in the foot-prints of a giant, and to stumble with little steps along the road where his great strides were taken. Yet many years have passed since Hazlitt trod this way; fresh flowers have grown by the route, and fresh weeds have fought with them for mastery. The face of the country has changed for better or for worse, and a brief survey reveals much that never met his eyes. The journey, too, was safer in his day than in ours; and while he gathers and analyzes every species of wit and humor, it plainly does not occur to him for a moment that either calls for any protection at his hands. Hazlitt is so sure that laughter is our inalienable right, that he takes no pains to soften its cadences or to justify its mirth. "We laugh at that in others which is a serious matter to ourselves," he says, and sees no reason why this should not be. "Some one is

generally sure to be the sufferer by a joke;" and, fortified with this assurance, he confesses to a frank delight in the comic parts of the Arabian Nights, although recognizing keenly the spirit of cruelty that underlies them, and aware that they "carry the principle of callous indifference in a jest as far as it can go." Don Quixote, too, he stoutly affirms to be as fitting a subject for merriment as Sancho Panza. Both are laughable, and both are meant to be laughed at; the extravagances of each being pitted dexterously against those of the other by a great artist in the ridiculous. But he is by no means insensible to the charm and goodness of the "ingenious gentleman;" for sympathy is the legitimate attribute of humor, and even where the humorist seems most pitiless, and even brutal, in his apprehension of the absurd, he has a living tenderness for our poor humanity which is so rich in its absurdities.

Hazlitt's definition of wit and humor is perhaps as good as any definition is ever likely to be; that is, it expresses a half-truth with a great deal of reasonableness and accuracy. "Humor," he says, "is the describing the

ludicrous as it is in itself; wit is the exposing it by comparing or contrasting it with something else. Humor is the growth of nature and accident; wit is the product of art and fancy. Humor, as it is shown in books, is an imitation of the natural or acquired absurdities of mankind, or of the ludicrous in accident, situation, and character; wit is the illustrating and heightening the sense of that absurdity by some sudden and unexpected likeness or opposition of one thing to another, which sets off the quality we laugh at or despise in a still more contemptible or striking point of view."

This is perhaps enough to show us at least one cause of the endless triumph of humor over wit, — a triumph due to its closer affinity with the simple and elementary conditions of human nature and life. Wit is artificial; humor is natural. Wit is accidental; humor is inevitable. Wit is born of conscious effort; humor, of the allotted ironies of fate. Wit can be expressed only in language; humor can be developed sufficiently in situation. Wit is the plaything of the intellectual, or the weapon of nimble minds; humor is the possession of all sorts and conditions of men. Wit is truly

what Shelley falsely imagined virtue to be, "a refinement of civilized life;" humor is the property of all races in every stage of development. Wit possesses a species of immortality, and for many generations holds its own; humor is truly immortal, and as long as the eye sees, and the ear hears, and the heart beats, it will be our privilege to laugh at the pleasant absurdities which require no other seed or nurture than man's endless intercourse with man.

Nevertheless, an understanding of the differences in nations and in epochs helps us to the enjoyment of many humorous situations. We should know something of England and of India to appreciate the peculiar horror with which Lord Minto, on reaching Calcutta, beheld the fourteen male attendants who stood in his chamber, respectfully prepared to help him into bed; or his still greater dismay at being presented by the rajah of Bali with seven slaves, — five little boys and two little girls, — all of whom cost the conscientious governor-general a deal of trouble and expense before they were properly disposed of, and in a fair way to learn their alphabet and catechism.

Yet perhaps a deeper knowledge of time and character is needed to sound the depths of Sir Robert Walpole's cynical observation, "Gratitude is a lively sense of future favors;" although this is indeed a type of witticism which possesses inherent vitality, not depending upon any play of words or double meanings, but striking deep root into the fundamental failings of the human heart.

It is in its simplest forms, however, that humor enjoys a world-wide actuality, and is the connecting link of all times and places and people. "Let us start from laughter," says M. Edmond Scherer, "since laughter is a thing familiar to every one. It is excited by a sense of the ridiculous, and the ridiculous arises from the contradiction between the use of a thing and its intention." Even that commonest of all themes, a fellow-creature slipping or falling, M. Scherer holds to be provocative of mirth; and in selecting this elementary example he bravely drives the matter back to its earliest and rudest principles. For it is a weapon in the hands of the serious that such casualties, which should excite instant sympathy and alarm, awaken laughter only in

those who are too foolish or too brutal to experience any other sensation. It would seem, indeed, that the sight of a man falling on the ice or in the mud cannot be, and ought not to be, very amusing. But before we frown severely and forever upon such vulgar jests, let us turn for a moment to a well-known essay, and see what Charles Lamb has to plead in their extenuation: —

"I am by nature extremely susceptible of street affronts; the jeers and taunts of the populace; the low-bred triumph they display over the casual trip or splashed stocking of a gentleman. Yet I can endure the jocularity of a young sweep with something more than forgiveness. In the last winter but one, pacing along Cheapside with my accustomed precipitation when I walk westward, a treacherous slide brought me upon my back in an instant. I scrambled up with pain and shame enough, — yet outwardly trying to face it down, as if nothing had happened, — when the roguish grin of one of these young wits encountered me. There he stood, pointing me out with his dusky finger to the mob, and to a poor woman (I suppose his mother) in particular, till the

tears for the exquisiteness of the fun (so he thought it) worked themselves out at the corners of his poor red eyes, red from many a previous weeping, and soot-inflamed, yet twinkling through all with such a joy, snatched out of desolation, that Hogarth — but Hogarth has got him already (how could he miss him?) in the March to Finchley, grinning at the pieman; — there he stood, as he stands in the picture, irremovable, as if the jest was to last forever, with such a maximum of glee and minimum of mischief in his mirth — for the grin of a genuine sweep hath absolutely no malice in it — that I could have been content, if the honor of a gentleman might endure it, to have remained his butt and his mockery till midnight."

Ah, prince of kindly humorists, to whom shall we go but to you for tears and laughter, and pastime and sympathy, and jests and gentle tolerance, and all things needed to make light our trouble-burdened hearts!

It is not worth while to deny or even to soften the cruel side of humor, though it is a far more grievous error to overlook its generous forbearance. The humorist's view of life

is essentially genial; but he has given stout blows in his day, and the sound of his vigorous warfare rings harshly in our unaccustomed ears. "The old giants of English fun" were neither soft-spoken nor soft-handed gentry, and it seems to us now and then as if they laid about them with joyous and indiscriminate activity. Even Dickens, the last and greatest of his race, and haunted often to his fall by the beckoning of mirthless modern phantoms, shows in his earlier work a good deal of this gleeful and unhesitating belligerency. The scenes between old Weller and Mr. Stiggins might be successfully acted in a spirited puppet-show, where conversation is of less importance than well-timed and well-bestowed pommeling. But we have now reached that point of humane seriousness when even puppet-shows cannot escape their educational responsibilities, and when Punch and Judy are gravely censured for teaching a lesson in brutality. The laughter of generations, which should protect and hallow the little manikins at play, counts for nothing by the side of their irresponsible naughtiness, and their cheerful disregard of all our moral standards. Yet

here, too, Hazlitt has a seasonable word of defense, holding indeed that he who invented such diverting pastimes was a benefactor to his species, and gave us something which it was rational and healthy to enjoy. "We place the mirth and glee and triumph to our own account," he says, "and we know that the bangs and blows the actors have received go for nothing as soon as the showman puts them up in his box, and marches off quietly with them, as jugglers of a less amusing description sometimes march off with the wrongs and rights of mankind in their pockets." It has been well said that wit requires a good head; humor, a good heart; and fun, high spirits. Punch's spirits, let us hasten to admit, are considerably in advance of his head and heart; yet nevertheless he is wanting neither in acuteness nor in the spirit of good-fellowship. He has hearkened to the advice given by Seneca many years ago, "Jest without bitterness"! and has practiced this delightful accomplishment for centuries, as befits the most conservative joker in the world.

Another reproach urged against humor rather than wit is its somewhat complicated

system of lying; and much well-merited severity has been expended upon such questionable diversions as hoaxing, quizzing, "selling," and other variations of the game, the titles of which have long since passed away, leaving their substance behind them. It would be easy, but untrue, to say that real humor has nothing whatever to do with these unworthy offshoots, and never encourages their growth. The fact remains that they spring from a great humorous principle, and one which critics have been prompt to recognize, and to embody in language as clear and unmistakable as possible. "Lying," says Hazlitt, "is a species of wit and humor. To lay anything to a person's charge from which he is perfectly free shows spirit and invention; and the more incredible the effrontery the greater is the joke." "The terrors of Sancho," observes M. Scherer, "the rascalities of Scapin, the brags of Falstaff, amuse us because of their disproportion with circumstances, or their disagreement with facts." Just as Charles Lamb humanizes a brutal jest by turning it against himself, so Sir Walter Scott gives amusing emphasis to a lie by directing it against his own personality.

His description of himself in his journal as a "pebble-hearted cur," the occasion being his parting with the emotional Madame Mirbel, is truly humorous, because of its remoteness from the truth. There are plenty of men who could have risked using the phrase without exciting in us that sudden sense of incongruity which is a legitimate source of laughter. A delightful instance of effrontery, which shows both spirit and invention, is the story told by Sir Francis Doyle of the highwayman who, having attacked and robbed Lord Derby and his friend Mr. Grenville, said to them with reproachful candor, "What scoundrels you must be to fire at gentlemen who risk their lives upon the road!" As for the wit that lies in playful misstatements and exaggerations, we must search for it in the riotous humor of Lamb's letters, where the true and the false are often so inextricably commingled that it is a hopeless task to separate facts from fancies. "I shall certainly go to the naughty man for fibbing," writes Lamb, with soft laughter; and the devout apprehension may have been justly shared by Edward Fitzgerald, when he describes the parish church at Woodbridge as

being so damp that the fungi grew in great numbers about the communion table.

A keen sense of the absurd is so little relished by those who have it not that it is too often considered solely as a weapon of offense, and not as a shield against the countless ills that come to man through lack of sanity and judgment. There is a well-defined impression in the world that the satirist, like the devil, roams abroad, seeking whom he may devour, and generally devouring the best; whereas his position is often that of the besieged, who defends himself with the sharpest weapons at his command against a host of invading evils. There are many things in life so radically unwholesome that it is not safe to approach them save with laughter as a disinfectant; and when people cannot laugh, the moral atmosphere grows stagnant, and nothing is too morbid, too preposterous, or too mischievous to meet with sympathy and solemn assurances of good will. This is why a sense of the ridiculous has been justly called the guardian of our minor morals, rendering men in some measure dependent upon the judgments of their associates, and laying the basis of that decorum and propriety

of conduct which is a necessary condition of human life, and upon which is founded the great charm of intercourse between equals. From what pitfalls of vanity and self-assurance have we been saved by this ever-watchful presence! Into what abysmal follies have we fallen when she withholds her restraining hand! Shelley's letters are perhaps the strongest argument in behalf of healthy humor that literature has yet offered to the world. Only a man burdened with an "invincible repugnance to the comic" could have gravely penned a sentence like this: "Certainly a saint may be amiable, — she *may* be so; but then she does not understand, — has neglected to investigate the religion which retiring, modest prejudice leads her to profess." Only a man afflicted with what Mr. Arnold mildly calls an "inhuman" lack of humor could have written thus to a female friend: "The French language you already know; and, if the great name of Rousseau did not redeem it, it would have been perhaps as well that you had remained ignorant of it." Our natural pleasure at this verdict may be agreeably heightened by placing alongside of it

Madame de Staël's moderate statement, "Conversation, like talent, exists only in France." And such robust expressions of opinion give us our clearest insight into at least one of the dangers from which a sense of the ridiculous rescues its fortunate possessor.

When all has been said, however, we must admit that edged tools are dangerous things to handle, and not infrequently do much hurt. "The art of being humorous in an agreeable way" is as difficult in our day as in the days of Marcus Aurelius, and a disagreeable exercise of this noble gift is as unwelcome now as then. "Levity has as many tricks as the kitten," says Leigh Hunt, who was quite capable of illustrating and proving the truth of his assertion, and whose scratching at times closely resembled the less playful manifestations of a full-grown cat. Wit is the salt of conversation, not the food, and few things in the world are more wearying than a sarcastic attitude towards life. "Je goûte ceux qui sont raisonnables, et me divertis des extravagants," says Uranie, in "La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes;" and even these words seem to tolerant ears to savor unduly of arrogance. The best use we can make

of humor is, not to divert ourselves with, but to defend ourselves against, the folly of fools; for much of the world's misery is entailed upon her by her eminently well-meaning and foolish children. There is no finer proof of Miss Austen's matured genius than the gradual mellowing of her humor, from the deliberate pleasure affected by Elizabeth Bennet and her father in the foibles of their fellow-creatures to the amused sympathy betrayed in every page of "Emma" and "Persuasion." Not even the charm and brilliance of "Pride and Prejudice" can altogether reconcile us to a heroine who, like Uranie, diverts herself with the failings of mankind. What a gap between Mr. Bennet's cynical praise of his son-in-law, Wickham, — which, under the circumstances, is a little revolting, — and Mr. Knightley's manly reproof to Emma, whose youthful gayety beguiles her into an unkind jest. While we talk much of Miss Austen's merciless laughter, let us remember always that the finest and bravest defense of harmless folly against insolent wit is embodied in this earnest remonstrance from the lips of a lover who is courageous enough to speak plain truths, with no suspicion of priggishness to mar their wholesome flavor.

It is difficult, at any time, to deprive wit of its social or political surroundings; it is impossible to drive it back to those deeper, simpler sources whence humor springs unveiled. "Hudibras," for example, is witty; "Don Quixote" is humorous. Sheridan is witty; Goldsmith is humorous. To turn from the sparkling scenes where the Rivals play their mimic parts to the quiet fireside where the Vicar and Farmer Flamborough sit sipping their gooseberry wine is to reënter life, and to feel human hearts beating against our own. How delicate the touch which puts everything before us with a certain gentle, loving malice, winning us to laughter, without for a moment alienating our sympathies from the right. Hazlitt claims for the wicked and witty comedies of the Restoration that it is their privilege to allay our scruples and banish our just regrets; but when Goldsmith brings the profligate squire and his female associates into the Vicar's innocent household, the scene is one of pure and incomparable humor, which nevertheless leaves us more than ever in love with the simple goodness which is so readily deceived. Mr. Thornhill utters a questionable

sentiment. The two fine ladies, who have been striving hard to play their parts, and only letting slip occasional oaths, affect great displeasure at his laxness, and at once begin a very discreet and serious dialogue upon virtue. "In this my wife, the chaplain, and I soon joined; and the squire himself was at last brought to confess a sense of sorrow for his former excesses. We talked of the pleasures of temperance, and of the sunshine of the mind unpolluted with guilt. I was so well pleased that my little ones were kept up beyond the usual time, to be edified by so much good conversation. Mr. Thornhill even went beyond me, and demanded if I had any objection to giving prayers. I joyfully embraced the proposal; and in this manner the night was passed in a most comfortable way, till at length the company began to think of returning." What a picture it is! What an admirably humorous situation! What easy tolerance in the treatment! We laugh, but even in our laughter we know that not for the space of a passing breath does Goldsmith yield his own sympathy, or divert ours, away from the just cause of innocence and truth.

If men of real wit have been more numerous in the world than men of real humor, it is because discernment and lenity, mirth and conciliation, are qualities which do not blend easily with the natural asperity of our race. Humor has been somewhat daringly defined as "a sympathy for the seamy side of things." It does not hover on the borders of the light and trifling; it does not linger in that keen and courtly atmosphere which is the chosen playground of wit; but diffusing itself subtly throughout all nature, reveals to us life, — life which we love to consider and to judge from some pet standpoint of our own, but which is so big and wonderful, and good and bad, and fine and terrible, that our little peaks of observation command only a glimpse of the mysteries we are so ready and willing to solve. Thus, the degree of wit embodied in an old story is a matter of much dispute and of scant importance; but when we read that Queen Elizabeth, in her last illness, turned wearily away from matters of state, "yet delighted to hear some of the 'Hundred Merry Tales,' and to such was very attentive," we feel we have been lifted into the regions of humor, and by its sudden light

we recognize, not the dubious merriment of the tales, but the sick and world-worn spirit seeking a transient relief from fretful care and poisonous recollections. So, too, when Sheridan said of Mr. Dundas that he resorted to his memory for his jests, and to his imagination for his facts, the great wit, after the fashion of wits, expressed a limited truth. It was a delightful statement so far as it went, but it went no further than Mr. Dundas, with just the possibility of a second application. When Voltaire sighed, "Nothing is so disagreeable as to be obscurely hanged," he gave utterance to a national sentiment, which is not in the least witty, but profoundly humorous, revealing with charming distinctness a Frenchman's innate aversion to all dull and commonplace surroundings. Dying is not with him, as with an Englishman, a strictly "private affair;" it is the last act of life's brilliant play, which is expected to throw no discredit upon the sparkling scenes it closes.

The breadth of atmosphere which humor requires for its development, the saneness and sympathy of its revelations, are admirably described by one of the most penetrating and

least humorous of French critics, M. Edmond Scherer, whose words are all the more grateful and valuable to us when they refer, not to his own countrymen, but to those robust English humorists whom it is our present pleasure to ignore. M. Scherer, it is true, finds much fault, and reasonable fault ever, with these stout-hearted, strong-handed veterans. They are not always decorous. They are not always sincere. They are wont to play with their subjects. They are too eager to amuse themselves and other people. It is easy to make out a list of their derelictions. "Yet this does not prevent the temperament of the humorist from being, on the whole, the happiest that a man can bring with him into this world, nor his point of view from being the fairest from which the world can be judged. The satirist grows wroth; the cynic banters; the humorist laughs and sympathizes by turns. . . . He has neither the fault of the pessimist, who refers everything to a purely personal conception, and is angry with reality for not being such as he conceives it; nor that of the optimist, who shuts his eyes to everything missing on the real earth, that he may comply with the

demands of his heart and of his reason. The humorist feels the imperfections of reality, and resigns himself to them with good temper, knowing that his own satisfaction is not the rule of things, and that the formula of the universe is necessarily larger than the preferences of a single one of the accidental beings of whom the universe is composed. He is beyond doubt the true philosopher."

This is a broad statement; yet to endure life smilingly is no ignoble task; and if the humors of mankind are inseparably blended with all their impulses and actions, it is worth while to consider bravely the value of qualities so subtle and far-reaching in their influences. Steele, as we know, dressed the invading bailiffs in liveries, and amazed his guests by the number and elegance of his retainers. Sydney Smith fastened antlers on his sheep, for the gratification of a lady who thought he ought to have deer in his park. Such elaborate jests, born of invincible gayety and high spirits, seem childish to our present adult seriousness; and we are too impatient to understand that they represent an attitude, and a very healthy attitude, towards life. The

iniquity of Steele's career lay in his repeatedly running into debt, not in the admirable temper with which he met the consequences of that debt when they were forced upon him; and if the censorious are disposed to believe that a less happy disposition would have avoided these consequences, let them consider the careers of poor Richard Savage and other misanthropic prodigals. As for Sydney Smith, he followed Burton's excellent counsel, "Go on then merrily to heaven;" and his path was none the less straight because it was smoothed by laughter. That which must be borne had best be borne cheerfully, and sometimes a single telling stroke of wit, a single word rich in manly humor, reveals to us that true courage, that fine philosophy, which endures and even tolerates the vicissitudes of fortune, without for a moment relinquishing its honest hold upon the right. Mr. Lang has told us such a little story of the verger in a Saxon town who was wont to show visitors a silver mouse, which had been offered by the women to the Blessed Virgin that she might rid the town of mice. A Prussian officer, with that prompt brutality which loves to offend religious

sentiment it does not share, asked jeeringly, "Are you such fools as to believe that the creatures went away because a silver mouse was dedicated?" "Ah, no," replied the verger, "or long ago we should have offered a silver Prussian."

It is the often-expressed opinion of Leigh Hunt that although wit and humor may be found in perfection apart from each other, yet their best work is shared in common. Wit separated from humor is but an element of sport; "a laughing jade," with petulant whims and fancies, which runs away with our discretion, confuses our wisdom, and mocks at holy charity; yet adds greatly, withal, to the buoyancy and popularity of life. It makes gentlefolk laugh, — a difficult task, says Molière; it scatters our faculties, and "bears them off deridingly into pastime." It is a fire-gleam in our dull world, a gift of the gods, who love to provide weapons for the amusement and discomfiture of mankind. But humor stands on common soil, and breathes our common air. The kindly contagion of its mirth lifts our hearts from their personal apprehension of life's grievances, and links us

together in a bond of mutual tears and laughter. If it be powerless to mould existence, or even explain it to our satisfaction, it can give us at least some basis for philosophy, some scope for sympathy, and sanity, and endurance. "The perceptions of the contrasts of human destiny," says M. Scherer, "by a man who does not sever himself from humanity, but who takes his own shortcomings and those of his dear fellow-creatures cheerfully, — this is the essence of humor."

LETTERS.

It is one of the current complaints of to-day that the art of letter-writing, as our great-grandfathers and our great-great-grandfathers knew it, has been utterly and irrevocably lost. Railways, which bring together easily and often people who used to spend the greater portion of their lives apart; cheap postage, which relieves a man from any serious responsibility for what he writes, — the most insignificant scrawl seems worth the stamp he puts on it; the hurried, restless pace at which we live, each day filled to the brim with things which are hardly so important as we think them, and which have cost us the old rich hours of leisurely thought and inaction, — these are the forces which have conspired to destroy the letter, and to crowd into its place that usurping and unprofitable little upstart called the note. "The art of note-writing," says Mr. Bagehot, "may become classical; it is for the present age to

provide models for that sort of composition; but letters have perished. In the last century, cultivated people who sat down to write took pains to have something to say, and took pains to say it. The correspondence of to-day is like a series of telegrams with amplified headings. There is not more than one idea, and that idea soon comes and is soon over. The best correspondence of the past is rather like a good light article, in which the points are studiously made; in which the effort to make them is studiously concealed; in which a series of selected circumstances is set forth; in which you feel, but are not told, that the principle of the writer's selection was to make his composition pleasant."

It is difficult not to agree with Mr. Bagehot and other critics who have uttered similar lamentations. The letter which resembled a good light article has indeed disappeared from our midst, and I am not sure that many dry eyes have not witnessed its departure. Light articles are now provided for us in such generous measure by our magazines that we have scant need to exact them from our friends. In fact, we should have no time to read them, if

they were written. A more serious loss is the total absence of any minute information or gossip upon current topics in the mass of modern correspondence. The letter which is so useful to historians, which shows us, and shows us as nothing else can ever do, the ordinary, every-day life of prominent men and women, this letter has also disappeared, and there is nothing to take its place. We can reconstruct the England, or at least the London of George II. and George III. from the pages of Horace Walpole. Who is there likely to hand down in this fashion to a coming generation the England of Queen Victoria? Neither does the fact of Walpole's being by no means a bigot in the matter of truth-telling interfere with his real value. He lies consciously and with a set purpose here and there; he is unconsciously and even inevitably veracious in the main. There are some points, observes Mr. Bagehot, on which almost everybody's letters are true. "The delineation of a recurring and familiar life is beyond the reach of a fraudulent fancy. Horace Walpole was not a very scrupulous narrator, yet it was too much trouble, even for him, to tell lies

on many things. His stories and conspicuous scandals are no doubt often unfounded; but there is a gentle undercurrent of daily unremarkable life and manners which he evidently assumed as a datum for his historical imagination."

We may be quite sure, for example, on his testimony, that people of fashion went to Ranelagh two hours after the music was over, because it was thought vulgar to go earlier; that Lord Derby's cook gave him warning, rather than dress suppers at three o'clock in the morning; that when a masked ball was given by eighteen young noblemen at Soho, the mob in the street stopped the fine coaches, held up torches to the windows, and demanded to have the masks pulled off and put on at their pleasure, "but all with extreme good-humor and civility;" that he, Horace Walpole, one night at Vauxhall, helped Lady Caroline Petersham to mince seven chickens in a china dish, which chickens "Lady Caroline stewed over a lamp, with three pats of butter and a flagon of water, stirring and rattling and laughing, and we every minute expecting to have the dish fly about our ears;"

that at the funeral of George II., the Duke of Newcastle — that curious burlesque of an English nobleman — stood on the train of the butcher Duke of Cumberland to avoid the chill of the marble. If we think these things are not worth knowing, we had better not read Walpole's letters, for these are the things which he delights in telling us. Macaulay thought these things were not worth knowing, and he has accordingly branded Walpole as a superficial observer, a vain and shallow worldling. How, he wonders, can we listen seriously to a man who haunted auctions; who collected bricabrac; who sat up all night playing cards with fine, frivolous ladies; who liked being a fashionable gentleman, and had no proper pride in belonging to the august assemblage of authors; and who, most deadly crime of all, lived face to face with the great Whig leaders of the day, and was not in the least impressed by the magnitude of the distinction thus conferred on him. But, after all, we cannot, every one of us, be built upon the same solemn and righteous lines. It is not even granted to every one to be a fervent and consistent Whig. Horace Walpole, you see, was Horace Wal-

pole, and not Thomas Babington Macaulay: therefore Macaulay despised him, and called on all his readers to despise him too. We can only have recourse to Mr. Lang's philosophy: "'T is a wide world, my masters; there is room for both." Walpole is the prince of letter-writers, because writing letters was the inspiration, the ruling passion of his life, and he was preëminently qualified for the task. It has been well said that had some evil chance wrecked him, like Robinson Crusoe, upon a desert island, he would have gone on writing letters just the same, and waited for a ship to carry them away. This is a pleasant conceit, because the spectacle of Horace Walpole on a desert island is one which captivates the idle fancy. Think of his little airs and graces, his courtly affectations, his fine clothes and frippery, his dainty epicureanism, his sense of good comradeship, all thrown away upon a desert island, and upon the society of a parrot and a goat. What malicious tales he would have been forced to invent about the parrot! It is best not to believe evil of any one upon Walpole's word, especially not of any one who had ever attacked Sir Robert's ministry; for

Horace's filial piety took the very exclusive form of undying enmity to all his father's political opponents. But when we have passed over and tried to forget all that is spiteful and caustic and coarse in these celebrated letters, there is a great deal left, a great deal that is not even the current gossip of the day. He goes to Paris in 1765, and finds that laughing is out of fashion in that once gay capital. "Good folks!" he cries, "they have no time to laugh. There are God and the king to be pulled down first, and men and women, one and all, are devoutly employed in the demolition. They think me quite profane for having my belief left." A few years later, Walpole sees clearly that French politics must end in "despotism, a civil war, or assassination." The age is not, he says, as he once thought, an age of abortion; but rather "an age of seeds which are to produce strange crops hereafter." Surely, even Macaulay might allow that these are the words of a thinker, of a prophet, perhaps, standing unheeded in the market-place.

Granted, then, that the light-article letter, and the letter which gives us material with

which to fill up the gaps and crannies of history, which holds the life of the past embalmed in its faded pages, have disappeared, perhaps forever. There is another letter which has not disappeared, which never can disappear as long as man stays man and woman, woman, — the letter which reveals to us the personality of the writer; which is dear and valuable to us because in it his hand stretches out frankly from the past, and draws us to his side. It may be long or short, carefully or carelessly written, full of useful information or full of idle nonsense. We do not stop to ask. It is enough for us to know from whom it came. And the finest type of such a letter may surely be found in the well-loved correspondence of Charles Lamb. If we eliminated from his pages all critical matter, all those shrewd and admirable verdicts upon prose and verse; if we cut out ruthlessly such scraps of news as they occasionally convey; if we banished all references to celebrated people, from the "obnoxious squeak" of Shelley's voice to the generous sympathy expressed for Napoleon, we should still have left — the writer himself, which is all that we desire. We should still

have the record of that harmless and patient, that brave and sorely tried life. We should still see infinite mirth and infinite pathos interwoven upon every page. We should catch the echo of that clear, kind laughter which never hardens into scorn. Lamb laughs at so many people, and never once wrongs any one. We should see the flashes of a wit which carries no venom in its sting. We should feel that atmosphere of wonderful, whimsical humor illuminating all the trivial details of existence. We should recognize in the turning of every sentence, the conscious choice of every word, the fine and distinctive qualities of a genius that has no parallel.

It matters little at what page we read. Here is the sad story of Henry Robinson's waistcoat, which Mary Lamb tried to bring over from France, but which was seized at the Custom House, "for the use of the king," says Charles dryly. "He will probably appear in it at the next levee." Here is the never-to-be-forgotten tea-party at Miss Benjay's, where that tenth-rate little upstart of a woman — type of a genus that survives to-day — alternately patronized and snubbed her guest;

flinging at him her pitiful scraps of information, marveling that he did not understand French, insulting him when he ventured an opinion upon poetry, — "seeing that it was my own trade in a manner," — imparting to him Hannah More's valuable dogmas on education, feeding him scantily with macaroons, and sending him home, — not angry as he had a right to be, as any other man would have been in his place, only infinitely amused. And then some people say that a keen sense of the ridiculous is not a kindly sentiment! It is, we know it is, when we read the letter to Coleridge in which Lamb tells how he went to condole with poor Joseph Cottle on the death of his brother Amos, and how, as the readiest comfort he could offer, he swiftly introduced into his conversation Joseph's epic poem, "Alfred," luring the mourner gently from his grief by arousing his poetic vanity. The dear, good, stupid Cottle, brightening visibly under such soothing treatment, fixed upon his visitor a benevolent gaze, and prepared himself for melancholy enjoyment. After a while the name of Alswitha, Alfred's queen, was slipped adroitly into the discourse. "At that mo-

ment," says Lamb, "I could perceive that Cottle had forgot his brother was so lately become a blessed spirit. In the language of mathematicians, the author was as nine, the brother as one. I felt my cue, and strong pity stirring at the root, I went to work." So the little comedy proceeds, until it reaches its climax when George Dyer, to whom all poems were good poems, remarks that the dead Amos was estimable both for his head and heart, and would have made a fine poet if he had lived. "To this," says Lamb, "Joseph fully assented, but could not help adding that he always thought the qualities of his brother's heart exceeded those of his head. I believe his brother, when living, had formed precisely the same idea of him; and I apprehend the world will assent to both judgments." Now if we will but try to picture to ourselves how Carlyle would have behaved to poor Miss Benjay, how Walpole would have sneered at Joseph Cottle, we will understand better the harmless, the almost loving nature of Charles Lamb's raillery, which we can enjoy so frankly because it gave no pain.

As for the well-known fact that Lamb's let-

ters reflect nothing of the political tumult, the stirring warfare, amid which he lived, it is interesting to place by their side the contemporary letters of Sir Gilbert Elliot, the first Earl of Minto, a correspondence the principal charm of which is the revelation it makes of a nature so fine and brave, so upright and honorable, so wise and strong and good, that we can best understand the secret of England's greatness when we know she has given birth to such sons. To study the life of a man who played so prominent a part in home and foreign politics is to study the history of Europe during those troubled years. In Lord Minto's letters we follow breathlessly the desperate struggle with Napoleon, the ceaseless wrangling of the Allies, the dangerous rebellions in Ireland, the grave perplexities of the Indian empire; and besides these all-important topics, we have side-lights thrown upon social life. We learn, for instance, that Mrs. Crewe, the celebrated beauty and toast of the Whigs, liked good conversation, and took an interest and even a part, writes Sir Gilbert naïvely to his wife, "in all subjects which men would naturally talk of when *not* in woman's com-

pany, as politics and literature." We learn also — what we half suspected before — that Madame de Stäel was so greedy of admiration that she was capable of purchasing "any quantity of anybody at any price, and among other prices by a traffic of mutual flattery;" and that she was never satisfied unless she could have the whole conversation to herself, and be the centre of every company.

Now, it is hardly to be expected that the letters of a great statesman and the letters of an obscure clerk in the India House should reveal precisely the same interests and information, any more than it is to be expected that the letters of the statesman — who was, after all, a statesman and no more — should equal in literary charm and merit the letters of the clerk who was in addition an immortal genius. But when we think how profoundly England was shaken and disturbed by the discords and apprehensions of those troubled times, how wars and the rumors of wars darkened the air, and stirred the blood of country bumpkins and placid rural squires, it seems a little strange that Lamb, who lived long years in the heart of London, and must have heard

so much of these things, should have written about them so little. He does learn when there is a change of ministry, because he hears a butcher say something about it in the market-place. He cultivates a frank admiration for Napoleon, whom all his countrymen hated and feared so madly. He would be glad, he says, to stand bareheaded at his table, doing honor to him in his fall. And, after the battle of Trafalgar, he writes to Hazlitt: "Lord Nelson is quiet at last. His ghost only keeps a slight fluttering in odes and elegies in newspapers, and impromptus which could not be got ready before the funeral."

These characteristic passages and others like them are all we hear of public matters from Charles Lamb, and few of us would ask for more. It is the continual sounding of the personal note that makes his pages so dear to us; it is the peculiarly restful character of his beloved chit-chat that keeps them so fresh and delightful. And while there is but one Lamb, there are many letters which have in them something of this same personal quality, something of this restful charm. The supply can never be exhausted, because letter-writing —

not light articles now, nor brilliant semi-historic narratives, but real letter-writing — is founded on a need as old and as young as humanity itself, the need that one human being has of another. The craving for sympathy; the natural and healthy egotism which prompts us to open our minds to absent friends; the desire we all feel to make known to others that which is happening to ourselves; the certainty we all feel that others will be profoundly interested in this revelation; the inextinguishable impulse to "pass on" experiences either of soul or body, to share with some one else that which we are hearing, or seeing, or feeling, or suffering, or enjoying, — these are the motives which make letter-writing essential and inevitable, crowd it into the busiest lives, assimilate it with the dullest understandings, and fit it into some crevice of every one's daily experience. Thus it happens that there is a strong family resemblance between letters of every age and every country; they really change less than we are pleased to think. The Rev. Augustus Jessopp, in one of his delightful essays, quotes from a long and chatty letter written, about the time that

Moses was a little lad, by an Egyptian gentleman named Pambesa to a friend named Amenemapt, and giving a very lively and minute account of the city of Rameses, which Pambesa was then happily visiting for the first time. We have all of us had just such letters from our absent friends, and have read them with mingled pleasure, and envy, and irritation. Pambesa the traveler is not disposed to spare Amenemapt the stay-at-home any detail of what he is missing. Never was there such a city of the gods as this particular town of Rameses which Amenemapt was not destined to see. There might be found the best of good living; vines, and fig-trees, and onion beds, and nursery gardens. Stout drinkers too were its jovial inhabitants, with a variety of strong liquors, sweet syrups richer than honey, red wine, and very excellent imported beer. Its women were all well dressed, and curled their hair enticingly, smoothing it with sweet oil. They stood at their doors, holding nosegays in their hands, and presenting a very alluring appearance to this gay and shameless Pambesa, who could hardly make up his mind to pass them coldly by. Altogether,

Rameses was an exceedingly pleasant town to visit, and the Egyptian gentleman was having a very jolly time of it, and we, reading his correspondence, fall to thinking that human nature before the Exodus was uncommonly like human nature to-day. This is one of the delights of letter-reading, that it reveals to us, not only the life of the past, but, better still, the people of the past, our brothers and sisters who, being dead, still live in their written pages. For the scholar the interest lies in what Pambesa has to tell; for the rest of us the interest lies in Pambesa himself, who, so many thousand years ago, drank the bitter beer, and stared at the pretty girls standing curled and flower-bedecked, with those demure, faint smiles which centuries cannot alter or impair.

So it continues, as we run swiftly down the years, the bulk of correspondence increasing enormously at every stage, until we reach such monuments of industry as the famous Cecil letters, preserved at Hatfield, and comprising over thirty thousand documents. It is pleasant to feel we need read none of these, and that, if we search for character, we may find it in

thirty words as well as in thirty thousand rolls of musty parchment. We may find it surely in that historic note dispatched by Ann, Countess of Dorset, to Sir Joseph Williamson, Secretary of State under Charles II., who wanted her to appoint a courtier as member from Appleby. Nothing could well be shorter; nothing could possibly be more significant. This is all: —

> Sir, — I have been bullied by an usurper, I have been ill-treated by a court, but I won't be dictated to by a subject. Your man shall not stand.
> Ann Dorset, Pembroke and Montgomery.

Now if you don't feel you know Ann Dorset pretty well after reading those four lines, you would n't know her if she left a diary as long as Samuel Pepys's; and if you don't feel, after reading them, that she is worth the knowing, it is hopeless for her to try and win your regard. Another and still more amusing instance of self-revelation may be found in a manuscript familiar to many who have visited the Bodleian Library at Oxford. There, among other precious treasures, is a collection of notes scribbled by Charles II. to Clarendon, and

by Clarendon to Charles II., to beguile the tedium of Council. They look, for all the world, like the notes which school-girls are wont to scribble to one another, to beguile the tedium of study. On one page, Charles in a little careless hand, not unlike a school-girl's, writes that he wants to go to Tunbridge, to see his sister. Clarendon in larger, firmer characters writes back that there is no reason why he should not, if he can return in a few days, and adds tentatively, "I suppose you will go with a light train." Charles, as though glowing with conscious rectitude, responds, "I intend to take nothing but my night-bag." Clarendon, who knows his master's luxurious habits, is startled out of all propriety. "Gods!" he writes: "you will not go without forty or fifty horse." Then Charles, who seems to have been waiting for this point in the dialogue, tranquilly replies in one straggling line at the bottom of the page. "I count that part of my night-bag." How plainly we can hear the royal chuckle which accompanied this gracious explanation! How really valuable is this scrap of correspondence which shows us for a moment Charles Stuart; not the Charles

of Sir Walter's loyal stories, nor the Charles of Macaulay's eloquent invectives; but Charles himself, our fellow mortal, and a very human character indeed.

If, as Mr. Bagehot affirms, it is for the present day to provide models which shall make the art of note-writing classical, we can begin no better than by studying the specimens already in our keeping. If we want humor, pathos, a whole tale told in half a dozen words, we have these things already in every sentence of Steele's hasty scrawls to his wife: "Prue, Prue, look a little dressed, and be beautiful." — And again: "'T is the glory of a Woman, Prue, to be her husband's Friend and Companion, and not his Sovereign Director." — Or "Good-nature, added to that beautiful form God has given you, would make an happinesse too great for Humane life." — And finally, "I am, dear Prue, a little in Drink, but at all times, Your Faithful Husband, Richard Steele."

These bare scraps of letters, briefer, many of them, than the "scandalous half-sheets" which Prue was wont to send in return, give us a tolerably clear insight into the precise

nature of Steele's domestic happiness. We understand, not only the writer, but the recipient of such missives, poor petulant Prue, who has had scant mercy shown her in Thackeray's brilliant pages, but whose own life was not passed upon a bed of roses. We are eager to catch these swift glimpses of real people through a few careless lines which have miraculously escaped destruction; or perhaps through a brief aside in an important, but, to us, very uninteresting communication; as, for example, when Marlborough reopens a dispatch to say that he has just received word of the surprise and defeat of the Dutch general, Opdam. "Since I sealed my letter," he writes with characteristic dryness, "we have a report from Breda that Opdam is beaten. I pray God it be not so, for he is very capable of having it happen to him." It is difficult not to enjoy this, because, if we sat within the shadow of Marlborough's tent, we could not hear him more distinctly; and the desire we feel to get nearer to the people who interest us, to know them as they really were, is, in the main, natural and wholesome. Yet there must be some limit set to the gratification of this desire, if

we are to check the unwarranted publishing of private letters which has become the recognized disgrace of literature. It is hard for us to understand just when our curiosity ceases to be permissible; it is harder still for editors to understand just when their privileges cease to be beneficial. Not many years ago it was possible for Mr. Bagehot to say that he took comfort in thinking of Shelley as a poet about whom our information was mercifully incomplete. Thanks to Professor Dowden, it is incomplete no longer; but we have scant cause to congratulate ourselves on what we have gained by his disclosures. Mr. Froude, acting up to an heroic theory of friendship, has pilloried Carlyle for the pleasure and the pain of gaping generations; but there are some who turn away with averted eyes from the sordid, shameful spectacle. Within the last decade the reading world welcomed with acclamations a volume of letters from the pen of one who had made it his especial request that no such correspondence should ever be published. How many of those who laughed over the witty, whimsical, intimate, affectionate outpourings of Thackeray paused to consider

that they would one and all have remained unwritten, could their author have foreseen their fate. They were not meant for us, they never would have reached us, had his known desires and prejudices been respected. Many of them are delightful, as when he tells with sedate humor of his absurd proposal to Macaulay that they should change identities at Sir George Napier's dinner, so as to confuse and baffle a young American woman, the desire of whose heart was to meet these two great lions, and of Macaulay's disgust at the bare notion of jesting with anything so serious as his literary reputation. Yet when the recipient of these letters yielded to the temptation of publishing them, she would have done well to suppress those trivial, colorless, and private communications which can have no possible value or interest to others. An invitation to dinner is of some importance the day that it arrives, but it loses its vitality when reprinted forty years after the dinner is eaten. There is horror in the thought that a man of genius can never promise himself that grateful privacy which is the lot of his happier and less distinguished brothers; but that after he has died in

the least ostentatious manner he knows how, the whole wide world is made acquainted with his diversions and his digestion, with his feeblest jokes and his most tender confidences. The problem of what to give and what to withhold must be solved by editors who, having laboriously collected their material, feel a natural disposition to use it. When, as occasionally happens, the editor regards the author simply as his prey, he never conceives the desirability of withholding anything. He is as unreserved as a savage, and probably defends himself, as did Montaigne when reproached for the impropriety of his essays, by saying that if people do not like details of that description they certainly take great pains to read them.

Among the letters too charming to be lost, yet too personal and frankly confiding to be read without some twinges of conscience, are those of Edward Fitzgerald, the last man in all England to have coveted such posthumous publicity. They reveal truthfully that kind, shy, proud, indolent, indifferent, and intensely conservative nature; a scholar without the prick of ambition, a critic with no desire to

be judicial, an unwearied mind turned aside from healthy and normal currents of activity. Yet the indiscreet publishing of a private opinion, a harmless bit of criticism such as any man has a right to express to a friend, drew down upon this least aggressive of authors abuse too coarse to be quoted. It is easy to say that Browning dishonored himself rather than Fitzgerald by the brutality of his language. This is true; but, nevertheless, it is not pleasant to go down to posterity branded with Billingsgate by a great poet; and it is doubly hard to bear such a weight of vituperation because a word said in a letter has been ruthlessly given to the world.

The unhesitating fashion in which women reveal themselves to their correspondents makes it seem treachery to read their printed pages. Those girlish confidences of Jane Austen to Cassandra, so frank and gay, so full of jokes and laughter, and country gossip, and sisterly affection, what a contrast they afford to the attitude of unbroken reserve which Miss Austen always presented to the world! Yet now the world is free to follow each foolish little jest, and to pass judgment on the wit it

holds. Those affectionate and not over-wise outpourings of Miss Mitford, with their effusive terms of endearment; those dignified and solemn reflections of Sara Coleridge, humanized occasionally by a chance remark about the baby, or an inadvertent admission that she has gone down twice to supper at an evening party; those keen, combative, brilliant letters of Mrs. Carlyle that are so bitter-sweet; those unreserved and purely personal communications of Geraldine Jewsbury which have no message whatever for the public; — how much has been given us to which we show scant claim! It is true that in the days when the Polite Letter-Writer ruled the land, and his baleful influence was felt on every side, a great many women wrote elaborate missives which nobody now wants to read, but which were then more highly prized than the gossiping pages we have learned to love so well. These sedate blue-stockings told neither their own affairs nor their neighbors'; but confined themselves to dignified generalities, expressed with Johnsonian elegance. There was Miss Seward, for example, who at times was too ridiculous for even Scott's genial forbearance; yet whose letters won her such a

reputation that we find them diligently sought for, years after they were penned. Fancy admiring groups of men and women listening to Miss Seward's celebrated epistles to Miss Rogers and Miss Weston, one of which begins: —

"Soothing and welcome to me, dear Sophia, is the regret you express for our separation! Pleasant were the weeks we have recently passed together in this ancient and embowered mansion. I had strongly felt the silence and vacancy of the depriving day on which you vanished. How prone are our hearts perversely to quarrel with the friendly coercion of employment, at the very instant in which it is clearing the torpid and injurious mists of unavailing melancholy."

The letter which opens in this promising manner closes, as might be expected, with a fervent and glowing apostrophe to the absent one: —

"Virtuous friendship, how pure, how sacred are thy delights! Sophia, thy mind is capable of tasting them in all their poignancy. Against how many of life's incidents may that capacity be considered as a counterpoise."

Now, in the last century, when people received letters of this kind, they did not, as we might suppose, laugh and tear them up. They treasured them sacredly in their desks, and read them to their young nieces and nephews, and made fair copies of them for less favored friends. Yet the same mail-bags which groaned under these ponderous compositions were laden now and then with Sir Walter's delightful pages, all aglow with that diffused spirit of healthy enjoyment, that sane and happy knowledge of life, that dauntless and incomparable courage. Perhaps they carried some of Cowper's letters, rich mines of pleasure and profit for us all, full to the brim of homely pleasant details which only leisure can find time to note. A man who was even ordinarily busy would never have stopped to observe the things which Cowper tells us about so charmingly, — the bustling candidate kissing all the maids; the hungry beggar who declines to eat vermicelli soup; the young thief who is whipped for stealing the butcher's iron-work; the kitchen table which is scrubbed into paralysis; the retinue of kittens in the barn; the foolish old cat who must needs pursue a viper crawling in the sun;

and the favorite tabby who ungratefully ran away into a ditch, and cost the family four shillings before she was recovered. Cowper had time to see all these things, had time to hear the soft click of Mrs. Unwin's knitting-needles, and the hum of the boiling tea-kettle; and he had moreover the faculty of bringing all that he saw and heard very vividly before our eyes, of interesting us, almost against our will, in the petty annals of an uneventful life. It is no more possible for important city men, heads of banking-houses and hard-working members of Parliament, to write letters of this kind, than it is possible for them to hold the attention of generations, as Gray so easily holds it, with a few playful lines of condolence on the death of a friend's cat, a few polished verses set like jewels in the delicate filigree of a sportive and caressing letter. "It would be a sensible satisfaction to me," he writes to Walpole, "before I testify my sorrow, and the sincere part I take in your misfortune, to know for certain who it is I lament. I knew Zara and Selima (Selima, was it? or Fatima?), or rather I knew them both together; for I cannot justly say which was which. Then as to

your 'handsome Cat,' the name you distinguish her by, I am no less at a loss, as well knowing one's handsome cat is always the cat one loves best; or if one be alive and one dead, it is usually the latter which is the handsomer. Besides, if the point were never so clear, I hope you do not think me so ill-bred or so imprudent as to forfeit all my interest in the survivor. Oh, no! I would rather seem to mistake, and imagine to be sure it must be the tabby one that has met with this sad accident."

Labor accomplishes many things in this busy, tired world, and receives her full share of applause for every nail she drives. But leisure writes the letters; leisure aided by observation, and sometimes — as in the case of Mme. de Sévigné — by that rare faculty of receiving and imparting impressions without judicial reasoning, by that winning, uncontentious amenity which accepts life as it is, and men as they chance to be. There is no rancor in the light laugh with which this charming Frenchwoman greets the follies and frivolities of her day. There is no moral protest in her amused survey of that attractive invalid,

Mme. de Brissac, who lies in bed so "curled and beautiful" that she turns everybody's head. "I wish you could have seen," writes Mme. de Sévigné to her daughter, "the use she made of her sufferings; of her eyes, of her sighs, of her arms, of her hands languishing on the counterpane, of the situation, and the compassion she excited. I was overcome with tenderness and admiration as I gazed on the performance, which seemed to me so fine. My riveted attention must surely have given satisfaction; and bear in mind that it was for the Abbé Bayard, for Saint Herens, for Montjeu and Plancy, that the scene was rehearsed. When I remember with what simplicity *you* are ill, you seem to me a mere bungler in comparison."

This is good-natured ridicule, keen but not condemnatory, without mercy, yet without upbraiding. Sainte-Beuve, who dearly loves Mme. de Sévigné, complains with reason that she is not even angry at things which ought to anger her, and that this gentle toleranee lacks humanity when cruelty and wrong-doing call for denunciation. Yet who can remember so long and tenderly a friend fallen and dis-

graced? Who can extend a helping hand so frankly to a fellow mortal? Who can love so devotedly, or sacrifice herself with such cheerful serenity at the shrine of her deep affections? Her memory comes down to us through two centuries, enriched with graceful fancies. We know her as one good and gay, gentle and witty and wise, who, by virtue of her supreme and narrowed genius, wrote letters unsurpassed in literature. "Keep my correspondence," said Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the heyday of her youth and pride. "It will be as good as Mme. de Sévigné's, forty years hence." But four times forty years have only served to widen the gulf between these two writers, and to place them in parted spheres. Their work springs from different sources, and is as unlike in inspiration as in form. "It is impossible," says Sainte-Beuve, "to speak of women without first putting one's self in a good humor by the thought of Mme. de Sévigné. With us moderns, this process takes the place of one of those invocations or libations which the ancients were used to offer up to the pure source of grace." In the same devout spirit I am glad to close my volume

with a few words about this incomparable letter-writer, with a little libation poured at her shadowy feet, that my last page may leave me and — Heaven permitting — my readers in a good humor, cheered by the pleasant memories which gild a passing hour.